

## Tauriel's Journey Home

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## Tauriel's Journey Home

by [adeclanfan](#)

### Summary

This is my take on the loose ends left at the end of The Hobbit: The Battle Of The Five Armies. I wanted to know what happens to Tauriel. Is she still banished? Does she get forgiven by Thranduil? I hope you like my take on her journey. Complete.

Bonus scene added 1/21/15.

## Letting Go

“It’s time to let go, Lassie.”

Tauriel looked up at the grey haired Dwarf, as he was their spokesman. “I... can’t. Please...” Her bloodied hand clutched at the chain mail covering Kili’s lifeless arm. The warmth had left him, leaving the metal cool under her palm.

“Kili’s gone. He’ll be raising a pint, now, with his brother and his father and the rest of our kin.” He put a gentle hand on her shoulder. “I’m sure he’ll want to be laid to rest beside his brother. It’s our way, to return the empty vessel to the ground, when we’ve finished our time in it.”

She nodded, because Tauriel knew this. Burying the dead wasn’t a custom Dwarves shared with the Eldar, but then nothing was, it seemed. “I... loved him. It was only for a moment...”

“I know you did, and more importantly, young Kili knew. You saved his life at least once, and we are grateful to you for every extra hour we had with him, lass. I fear it has cost you dearly...” His eyes went to where the Prince and a few of Thranduil’s guard stood trying not to watch their kinswoman break from her grief, far enough away, at least, to give the illusion of privacy, if not the reality.

The red-haired Elf whimpered, “I couldn’t save him this time.” The words were choked with a new sob.

“You did what you could do, young Tauriel, and it is all any can ask of you.” He smiled, “More than we should have asked, considering your King.” His fingers traced the tears on her cheek. “You gave him a gift, knowing what it feels to love and be loved in return, before he met his end.”

Tauriel nodded. “It hurts.”

“Aye, it does, at that. But it is a wonder, too. I’ve never heard of a Dwarf and an Elfkind exchanging hearts, and I doubt I ever will, again, at that. But it is a story worthy of passing on to the next generation, because it offers hope that our two peoples may someday bridge the chasm time and hard feelings have carved between our races.”

The Dwarf motioned for the others to come forward. One of them handed him a bundle of leather and steel, Kili’s daggers. He offered them in turn to Tauriel. “It is our tradition when a husband dies, to give the widow his daggers. Most pass them on to their bairn, if they have them.”

Tauriel looked at the daggers and then at the Dwarves, “I wasn’t his wife.”

Balin shrugged. “There isn’t one among our company, or any of the surviving decedents of Durin, who is going to quibble about such a small detail today. What you were is enough for us to consider you kin.”

Four of the Dwarves lifted Kili from her lap and placed his body gently on a wooden cart.

The old Dwarf placed a small chest on her lap in the place Kili’s head had rested seconds before. Tauriel stared at it, numbly, and he reached out to open the lid for her.

Inside was a mound of shining golden coins and jewels in a rainbow of colors. The outermost shining like pure, white stars.

Her brows grew together in confusion, and then anger.

“Now, before you go getting all grumpy and refusing to take the chest, hear me out, Lassie.” He lifted a ring from the top of the gems and placed it in her hand. The stone was a square cut emerald as big as the nail on her thumb. “Dwarves are stubborn and loud and hard headed, and Elves see us as uncivilized, but there is one thing none can deny, and it is that we take care of our own. As Kili’s one and only true love, you’ve earned his share of the treasures of Erebor. You’ll take it. Or we’ll be deeply offended.” He smiled grimly at her, “And there is only one thing worse than an offended Dwarf, and it is ten offended Dwarves.”

The other Dwarves chuckled and nodded their agreement.

“I don’t know what to say,” Tauriel whispered.

“Nothing to say, really. Pretty much said it all, except that you are welcome in the Halls of Erebor, Tauriel, anytime. You may need a place to live when the dust settles. And if you should ever need aid, we’ll come.”

He gave her one last pat on the shoulder, a consoling gesture that conveyed a hundred different things, and he turned to follow the somber procession of Dwarves taking Kili away to be prepared for burial.

Tauriel wept, but it wasn’t as much for Kili as for herself. He was in a better place, a happy place, surrounded by people who loved him and where no weapons could ever harm him. She was alone, despite the other Eldar nearby, and afraid.

It felt as if every inch of her was bruised and throbbed with agonizing pain. When she finally tried to stand, Tauriel found she couldn’t manage it. The world swam and tilted and grew dark at the edges of her vision. She sank back to her knees and the blackness rose up and took her.

## Chapter 2

The voices were distant, as if Tauriel was hearing them echo down a long tunnel. They rose and fell in turns as her body tried to shake itself apart from the cold of winter on the lake outside the walls of Dale and her injuries.

Something was very wrong with her body. Her head felt as if it was impaled on a pike, but she couldn't remember when that had happened. If she moved her limbs, even a little, pain stabbed at her like thousands of small, annoying knives. These she could tolerate, maybe for a time, but the strange pains in her chest and belly frightened her half out of her mind.

Was she dying? If so, why wasn't the pain getting further away instead of drawing closer in relentless waves of agony?

The voices were replaced by horrible keening she wished someone would stop, if only to give her ears and aching head a rest. Her throat hurt, and she distantly wondered why.

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"There must be something else you can do for her!"  
Legolas begged the healer. "Can't you see she's in pain?!"

The Eldar in charge of healing the battle wounded winced, not used to being the focus of the Prince's frustration. "I'm sorry, my Prince, but we've given Tauriel as much poppy as we dare. Another dose would stop her heart completely. The broken ribs punctured a lung, She's already more than halfway on her journey to Mandos as it stands." He didn't look happy about it. "I'm going to try again to heal her internal injuries, but several organs are badly damaged and I'm nearing exhaustion..."

The flap of the tent rustled, revealing King Thranduil. "Go and rest, healer, there are others you've been seeing to in addition to Tauriel. I will see to her myself until you are fit to return." The King surprised them both as he removed his fur lined cloak and washed his bloody hands in the basin of cold water on the table beside her cot. "I have some skill as a healer," he assured them, "and I have no desire to see another of my best warriors die today."

Thranduil gave the healer a chilly look when he continued to linger at Tauriel's bedside after the King dismissed him. "If I wanted Tauriel dead, I'd have seen to it myself hours ago when she threatened my life over that ridiculous Dwarfling."

To Legolas, he added, "I've invested too much time and energy training Tauriel to see her wasted in the Halls Of Waiting."

This seemed to pacify the healer, and he bowed his head to them and left.

Legolas remained, looking at his father anxiously. "Will she die?"

"Who can say? I don't have the gift of foresight, only hindsight and too many years of experience. If she wants to live, Tauriel has the will to hold to her flesh for a bit longer. If she grieves too deeply for the Dwarf, nothing anyone can do will save her."

Legolas frowned at his father. "You told her she wasn't good enough to be my wife." It wasn't what he'd intended to say, but it slipped out, making his cheeks grow hot.

Thranduil sighed. “A mistake. She didn’t know you were in love with her until I told her, and then she used the knowledge to best advantage.” His nostrils flared, “Tauriel left fully expecting you to chase after her.”

“I know.”

“That is why a match between you would never work. It isn’t her Silvan blood I was objecting to.”

“What exactly were you objecting to then? Her parents died defending the Woodland Realm. Tauriel has spent her life training and moving up the ranks in the guard, serving you and our people faithfully for hundreds of years.”

Thranduil’s brows knit together and his eyes narrowed in warning at the Prince’s tone of voice. “There is only one thing more painful than losing the person you love and pledged your life to protect. Loving someone who doesn’t return your love. If I thought Tauriel loved you as much as you love her, and not as merely a friend and comrade in arms, I wouldn’t have said anything.”

“How do you know she doesn’t love me?” Legolas demanded.

Thranduil tilted his head to the side, thinking. “How does one start a fire? Flint and steel make a spark. Striking flint against flint won’t start a fire, no matter how many times you try. You and Tauriel are both flint and unless one of you becomes steel by time or luck, there won’t be fire.”

Legolas shook his head in frustration. “You’re wrong.”

“When you find steel in a person, Legolas, you will see the sparks for yourself, feel them catch fire, and then you will know the truth of what I say.”

“If you mean desire, I feel desire for Tauriel. How can I not? She’s fierce and beautiful...”

Thranduil looked down at Tauriel’s small, broken form and Legolas could see his emotions very close to the surface, again. The way they had been when he talked of Legolas’ mother earlier. “Desire is only a part, the easy part.” He touched the smooth, pink line of a healed cut on Tauriel’s cheek.

“I don’t understand,” Legolas huffed.

“I hope someday you do, Legolas. But if you follow Tauriel’s example and fall in love with a Dwarf, I don’t know what I will do, but you can be sure you won’t like it,” Thranduil stated, only half jesting. “It has been many years since I was required to heal someone with as much damage as Tauriel has suffered and it would help my concentration if I didn’t have to do it before an audience, even an audience of one.”

The Prince nodded. “I’ll wait outside.”

“No. Go find something to eat and an empty cot. I’ll send someone to fetch you if Tauriel’s condition changes, for better or worse.”

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“Hush, Tauriel. Be still...” Thranduil commanded her in a gentle whisper, “I’m going to make the pain go away, but you’ve got to let me concentrate.”

Tauriel sobbed, “Hurts.”

The King pulled the heavy fur lined blanket down and hissed at the mottled patchwork of bruises covering nearly all of her normally pale skin. As gently as he could, Thranduil ran a hand over her flat belly. The worst of the bruising was centered there. He muttered a curse under his breath and closed his eyes to center himself.

Bile burned the back of his throat as he mentally pictured her soft, curved body in his mind's eye.

"Let me die."

Thranduil scowled and shook his head, "No."

"I don't regret it."

His eyes snapped open. "I don't imagine you do. Love is like that. It overrides common sense and reason."

Tauriel hissed as his hand pressed the bundle of broken herbs to her belly. And she groaned, "You were right. I don't love Legolas as I should. As he deserves."

"Enough. We will speak of this later."

Tauriel nodded, but remained mercifully silent as Thranduil called on the Valar to help him heal his precious, broken elf.

Power came to him much more quickly than he was prepared for and it made him smile at the irony of it. It figured the girl was in the favor of the Valar. He asked them for the power to heal her, to restore her body, mind and soul.

The room glowed with power while Tauriel cried and bloodied her lips biting them to keep from shrieking.

Then, as quickly as it had begun, the light faded and Tauriel lay before him panting and shivering from cold.

Thranduil drew the blanket up to cover her and added a second for good measure.

Tauriel looked so small and frail. Her eyes were closed; her breathing was no longer labored and wet sounding.

It wasn't long before she slipped into a deep, healing sleep.

Thranduil pressed a tender kiss to her forehead before putting his fur lined cloak back on and settling himself in a chair to keep watch over her, secure in the knowledge she wasn't going to die if he had anything to say about it.

## Chapter 3

“I don’t like Dwarves, as a rule, but I loathe that Dwarf most of all...” Thranduil grumbled. The Dwarf he meant was the new King, Dain Ironfoot. “We need to leave. Today.”

Legolas nodded, “I’ll go tell the horsemasters.” He turned to go, but his father stopped him with a hand on his arm.

“I’ll go with you. I think my presence will add the needed sense of urgency to their packing, but I want to check on Tauriel, first.”

They walked along the row of healing tents to get to the last one.

“You really have forgiven her.”

Thranduil missed a step in his long legged stride, and turned to shoot Legolas a look. “Of course, I have. You doubted it?”

“I’ve never seen you so angry at anyone, except perhaps me.”

The corners of Thranduil’s mouth turned up, an almost smile. “There have been times it does feel like I have more than one child in the palace to contend with.”

The King entered the tent first and froze, causing Legolas to jostle him as he followed a few steps behind.

The bed was empty.

Tauriel and the blankets were gone, also gone were the clean winter clothes and sturdy boots Thranduil had a servant fetch for Tauriel.

Her wounds were healed to a point where she was beyond immediate danger thanks to Thranduil’s efforts. Rest and more concentrated healing in her most injured areas could wait until they reached the safety of the royal palace.

“Where has she gone off to now?” Thranduil hissed.

Legolas paled. “I’ll go check the mess hall and the other healing tents.”

“I will speak with the guards on duty and the horsemaster. Someone will have seen her.”

“Father...” Legolas added, “Please don’t be too hard on her.”

Thranduil took a deep breath and let it out slowly, exhaling his temper. A simple calming exercise he’d used many times in the last few days to keep from strangling one person or another.

The King and the Prince met up outside the roped area where the horses were tied half an hour later.

“Did you find her?” Legolas asked, the beginnings of panic plain on his face.

Thranduil shook his head, pale hair flying around his shoulders.

“A horse went missing about two hours ago,” Legolas informed him.

The King didn't like that one bit. “Where would she go?”

Legolas hesitated, but finally admitted, “The Dwarves offered to let her stay with them in Erebor.”

Thranduil was shocked, but recovered himself quickly. “No. We would have seen her if she'd come that way.”

They attended the memorial in the morning for Thorin Oakenshield and his nephews, then the crowning of the new King under the Mountain.

Neither had thought to look for Tauriel there. She was supposed to be resting.

Apparently, she'd managed to get on her feet and take a horse without being seen.

“What do we do, now? Should we search for her?”

Thranduil considered his options, all of which were unacceptable. “We need to get the rest of our wounded home, first. We will surely find sign of her along the way.”

“I could ride ahead. Search for her.”

The King nodded, “Go. Find her. If she has no wish to return to Mirkwood...” Thranduil hesitated, not entirely ready to admit he'd chased her away from her home. “She is an incredibly wealthy Elf, now. Take her with you and see she gets to Rivendell before you continue your journey north. Lord Elrond welcomes many strays under his roof and he treats them all well enough. She will be safe there.”

Legolas nodded. “And if I don't find her?”

“I will.”

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Tauriel chose the Lothlorien side of the river for her journey. She didn't know why, except that in her flight from Dale she'd thought it safer to keep the river between her and Mirkwood.

The crowning of the new King had given her the perfect opening to get a horse and make a start. For where, she really didn't know.

Tauriel only knew that if she went home to Mirkwood, after being banished, the King would likely throw her in a cell or worse. She'd dreamed of home and each dream ended the same way, Thranduil ordering her death as an object lesson to the other Silvan elves.

In the dream this morning, he'd kissed her before the blade severed her head.

Riding a horse was never something she'd found joy in. It was utterly miserable with broken ribs and all the other places she still ached. The plan was to release the horse once she could arrange some other sort of transportation that was less abusive to her body.

It was easier than she expected to leave her home behind, until she glanced across the river and saw familiar shoreline. She slipped from the back of the horse.

Exhausted and shaken, Tauriel sank to her knees at the river's edge for a drink, then she watched her reflection in the water as she wept for her lost home, the friends she would never see again.



“Are you unwell, child?” A woman’s voice asked. Tauriel couldn’t see her until she came around the horse.

When she emerged, Tauriel gasped. Stories were told of how the Lady Galadriel was beautiful, but she’d never laid eyes on her before.

Beautiful wasn’t the word Tauriel would use. Thranduil was beautiful, coldly attractive in a dark, wild way.

Galadriel was so far beyond mere beauty, she made Tauriel feel like a mountain troll beside her.

Tauriel stood, stifling a groan as she managed to straighten all the way to her full height. “I’m fine.”

The Lady smiled patiently, “That is good. But I must say, you look like Mandos himself is following in your footsteps waiting for you to fall over, so he can collect you.”

“There was a battle...” Tauriel offered, in her defense.

“I am aware.”

Galadriel stroked the nose of her horse, not coming any closer, and Tauriel was glad.

The woman’s intense study of her made the wood-elf want to dive into the nearest hole, like a frightened rabbit.

“Do you need assistance crossing the river, Tauriel?”

Tauriel’s eyes widened at the use of her name. How did she know who she was? “How do you know my name, my Lady?”

“We have a mutual friend. He asked that I walk the river and look for a lost, injured sheep.”

“A mutual friend?” She wasn’t talking about King Thranduil, that Tauriel knew.

Lady Galadriel smiled. “Mithrandir. Gandalf.”

“Oh.”

“We have boats... if you are anxious to return home.”

Tauriel’s eyes were drawn to the land on the other side of the river, and she wondered if she would ever see her home again. Her control over her emotions faltered. Deep sobs wracked her already abused ribs and stole her breath.

Arms encircled her from behind and held her ever so gently against the Lady’s warm body. “You are cold, child.”

“I’m afraid.”

“I know,” Galadriel whispered in her ear, her chin rested on Tauriel’s shoulder.

Tauriel turned in her arms and sobbed on her shoulder. “I don’t want to die.”

“Then don’t.”

“He is very angry at me. I think he... he’ll kill me if he catches me.”

“Who wants to kill you? We killed all the Orcs who tried to retreat through our lands.”

“The King... Thranduil.”

Galadriel pulled back to look into her eyes. “Why would he want to kill you? You are a child... a badly injured one.”

“I threatened to kill him. Drew my bow and knocked an arrow at him. If Legolas hadn’t been there...” She shuddered. “I’m a traitor. I have no home. He banished me.”

Lady Galadriel cupped the back of Tauriel’s head and returned it to her shoulder. “Come home with me, then, child. We would never turn one of our young woodland kin away.”

“I fell in love with a Dwarf.” Tauriel confessed, fully expecting Galadriel to pull back in horror and change her mind about allowing Tauriel come with her.

Instead, the Lady chuckled, “Mithrandir said Thorin Oakenshield’s youngest nephew was the most beautiful, vibrant Dwarf he’d ever seen.”

“He was...” Tauriel sobbed.

Galadriel stroked her hair, and it was comforting. After her sobs eased, the Lady asked her, “Is it true the Dwarves gave you a widow’s honors and paid you the young Dwarf’s portion of Erebor’s treasure?”

“Yes.”

“What a remarkable young elleth must be. I hope you will stay with us long enough for us to get to know you.”

The powerful High Elven Lady did something with magic and Tauriel felt the world shimmer and swim around them. Her arms tightened around the other woman.

When Tauriel opened her eyes, they were no longer beside the river. Instead, they stood at the base of an enormous tree.

“The horse...”

“I’ve sent someone to fetch your lovely horse and return him to Dale.” Lady Galadriel untangled herself from the wood-elf’s embrace. “You are most welcome in Caras Galadhon, Tauriel.”

“Thank you.”

“Let’s get you into a warm bath and then I’ll have a tray with tea and bread and broth brought up for you.”

“I’m so tired.”

“You’ll find Lothlorien very different from the lands of your birth, but we are not so different, child. You can rest in peace and safety here for as long as you choose.”

## Chapter 4

Legolas slept at the palace for a single night, long enough to collect his belongings from his rooms and offer his report to King Thranduil.

He'd found no signs of Tauriel, despite searching Dale, the slopes of Erebor and the ruins of Laketown.

King Dain's Dwarves volunteered to search the huge tunnels, before they blew them up, and all the surrounding areas. If they found her, or any sign of where she'd gone, they would send word to Thranduil.

Then, Legolas left and the palace was colder and darker than Thranduil could ever remember it.

His Elves were somber in their grief as they mourned their dead, but he refused to allow them to add Tauriel to their songs. To do so meant he'd given up hope of ever seeing her again, and he wasn't prepared to do that. Thranduil did what he could for the new widows and orphans left behind after the battle, both here and sending people to help rebuild Dale, and keeping as busy as possible with mundane details he would have let Legolas handle, if he were there. But, Legolas was gone, off to track down a Ranger in the North, and Thranduil blamed himself for both Tauriel and his son's hasty departures. The weight of his crown was nothing compared to the oppressive weight of his failure with the two young Elves whose lives he valued above all else.

Nearly a fortnight after Tauriel's disappearance, word came from his scouts that the horse Tauriel had taken had been returned to them by a pair of scouts from Lothlorien. They didn't state directly Tauriel was in Lothlorien, but Thranduil knew. He could feel it, and it made sense for Tauriel to have travelled the banks of the river. If she worried he was angry with her, she would have been wise to keep the waters of the Anduin between herself and an angry King.

Thranduil wasn't angry, though. He was sick with worrying she'd been taken down by Orcs or lay dying somewhere beyond his reach. Or worse, that she was already with Mandos and he would never have the opportunity to tell her what he needed to say.

Being old didn't make him omnipotent, or infallible. It made him lonely and cynical. Every millennium sucked more of the warmth and light out of his world, and he found himself thinking more and more about the lands of his birth. He'd always put on the act for Legolas, firmly stating they would remain in Middle Earth and never sail to the Undying Lands, but Thranduil wondered if there was something more left for him than stumbling on and on in darkness until the land swallowed him up or something finally killed him.

If Legolas ever sailed West, Thranduil would likely go mad with grief and loneliness.

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"King Thranduil, welcome back to Lothlorien. I've been expecting you," Galadriel stated, nodding to him regally. They both knew who held the true power between them, and it was refreshing to move past the mundane territorial threat displays males of all races seem to need and speak plainly.

"Have you, my Lady?"

"I have your lost lamb in my keeping. I've healed her, or maybe it is more precise to say I've

healed the damage to Tauriel's physical body. Given more time, I could help her with the night terrors that plague her and ease her grief, but she's not used to living in a bustling, unfamiliar city such as Caras Galadhon. The attention our ellyn are paying to her is more terrifying than flattering, I'm afraid."

A muscle in Thranduil's jaw twitched as he clenched his teeth. He forced himself to relax. It didn't surprise him they would see a beautiful, graceful newcomer like Tauriel and want to get to know her.

"Do not fear. She longs for home more as each day passes."

Thranduil was visibly relieved to hear it. Homesickness would make convincing her less difficult for him. "I've come to take her home."

Galadriel braced herself to ask the next question, the most important question when it came to whether or not she would allow Tauriel to leave with her King. "How do you plan to punish Tauriel for her defiance and disrespect when you get her back within your Halls?"

The King gave her a puzzled look. "I don't have any plans to punish Tauriel."

"Surely you aren't going to let her get away with standing up to you publicly and questioning your authority." Galadriel pushed a bit more. "She told me she threatened to kill you. Aimed an arrow at your heart."

He paled, but it wasn't anger he was feeling as much as remorse. "I fully intended to leave those granite headed Dwarves to die when the Gundabad Orcs attacked." He sighed, "Young Tauriel has been my conscience on more than one occasion, usually when I least wanted one."

"What's to stop other Silvan elves from following Tauriel's example of disrespect?"

"I know what you are doing, my Lady, and I have no plans to punish Tauriel." Thranduil aimed an icy glare at her. "I assure you. I'm not a monster."

"I'm not the one who doubts you. The fact remains: Tauriel is very afraid of you. I had no idea you ruled with such an iron fist."

Thranduil shook his head, and growled, "I'm not a tyrant, Galadriel. I care about my people, especially the young troublesome ones. Did I pass your test?"

Galadriel smiled, compassionately. "I wanted to give you the benefit of the doubt. But, Tauriel is vulnerable right now, and you must be gentle with her."

## Chapter 5

Thranduil followed Galadriel up the curving stairs to an elaborately decorated sitting room. It was perfect: warm and comfortable and private. She offered him a gentle smile, full of compassion. “I will have Tauriel sent here. You should have a chance to speak privately. I hope you will accept our offer to join us for dinner. And, as ever, you are welcome to stay as our honored guest... for as long as you need.” She put a hand on his shoulder. “It may take time for you to work out your differences with the child.”

“Thank you, my Lady. You are most thoughtful,” Thranduil nodded, offering her a charming smile. “I will stay, of course.”

When she left him, Thranduil settled into a thickly padded armchair beside the crackling fire to wait. He closed his eyes in an effort to refocus his scattered thoughts and prepare the calm, logical arguments it would require to convince Tauriel to return home with him.

A gasp made his eyes snap open. Tauriel was standing in the doorway gaping at him and he felt himself mirroring the shocked expression on her face.

Tauriel was almost completely unrecognizable as the Captain in his Guard. Her deep red hair was loose, save for two tiny braids at her temples, hanging nearly to her hips in soft curls.

A flowing gown of pale blue fabric left her arms and much of her shoulders visible. It was nothing like the sturdy, layered attire she favored back home and he found it made him uncomfortable to see so much of the normally reserved Elf.

“Tauriel,” he whispered her name as he shot to his feet. At least, to his relief, his ability to speak had finally returned.

Tauriel wavered at his approach and started to fall, but Thranduil scrambled to catch hold of her before she hit the floor.

A look at her face showed she wasn't faint, as he first thought, she'd gone to her knees in a sign of respect and submission. She refused to raise her eyes to meet his concerned gaze. A tear leaked from the corner of her eye and it was then he noticed she'd applied some sort of paint around her eyes and to her lashes. Mixed with her tears, it made a small, dark smudge on her cheek.

Thranduil caressed it away with his thumb. “Was it Legolas you were expecting to see?”

“I'm sorry, my Lord.”

He tugged her back to her feet and caught her to him in a crushing embrace, whispering into her hair, “You're alive.”

When he pulled back, reluctant to release her, Thranduil said, “I had my doubts the last few days, but look at you...” He touched one of her curls reverently with the tip of his finger. “I've never seen you in a dress such as this. It suits you, Tauriel, makes you even more beautiful, and I didn't think that possible.”

Spots of color blossomed high on her cheeks and Tauriel looked away, uncertain of how to respond to his compliment.

“I'm relieved to see you recovered from your injuries,” Thranduil confessed. “The urge to kiss you

is overwhelming.” It didn’t help when his words made her mouth form a perfect little ‘O’ as she gasped in surprise. “I am fairly certain I can restrain myself, though for the sake of propriety. I haven’t kissed you in over six hundred years. Do you remember?”

Tauriel met his eyes, tentatively, and nodded. “I remember I was very young and completely out of control.” Under her breath, she added, “Some things don’t change.” To Thranduil, she said, “My foster guardian didn’t discipline me nearly enough.”

“I’m glad he didn’t.”

Tauriel’s eyes widened in disbelief. “I nearly hit you in the head with an apple.”

“I caught it easily enough,” Thranduil smirked at the memory.

She winced, guiltily. “I did hit you... in the chest.”

“It was my wager, Tauriel. I never faulted you for winning.” It was the truth. He’d never forgotten the encounter, or the unexpected treasure he’d found in those orchards. “Finding you was well worth the twenty gold coins and a bruise.”

Thranduil had been travelling the road to check on the progress of the harvest and he’d come across a group of playful Eldar tossing apples back and forth between the trees and laughing uproariously. They were so young and carefree, and he’d envied them that.

“I cheated,” Tauriel huffed, indignantly. “I told you I only had five apples left.”

Thranduil laughed, tugging her over to an upholstered bench to sit beside him. “It was an excellent strategy, and flawlessly executed. I never would have expected you to aim for the horse under me with the fifth, so I was too busy keeping my seat, my hands gripping the reins for all I was worth, to stop your sixth apple from hitting me squarely in the chest.”

“I aimed the first apple at your head,” Tauriel confessed.

He nodded, “I figured as much. Your aim with all the other apples was too good for a toss to go so wild.”

Tauriel blushed, again. “I didn’t know you were our King. You were wearing the hood up on your travelling cloak, and even if it had been down, I’d never seen your face.”

“I know that, too,” Thranduil chuckled. “I had my revenge when you reached for the purse of gold and I snatched you up and kissed you in front of all your friends.”

Tauriel winced at the memory. “I was very young and none too bright.”

Instead of cheering her, the memory seemed to make her sad. He was surprised to find how strongly his arms ached to hold her and offer comfort. “You are still very young, Tauriel,” he told her solemnly. “And you are the brightest light in all of my kingdom.”

He did consider steal a fleeting kiss from her, just leaning in quickly and brushing his lips over hers for the briefest of seconds before retreating, but something told him it wouldn’t be welcome. Yet.

Tauriel’s pupils dilated until the green color of her eyes was almost gone, her breaths coming faster, but he didn’t know if it was out of fear or desire. “What I did in Dale was wrong. I don’t know what came over me. I swear I didn’t want to hurt you,” Tauriel whispered, and her hands trembled in her lap. “I could have killed you.”

Thranduil smiled. "It's a good thing you didn't. It will be some time still before Legolas is ready to be a King. He has no desire to be more than a Prince, and he even bristles at that title."

Tauriel winced and bit her lip. It was distracting. The King found his eyes glued to those soft lips.

"Legolas has gone North to find someone who will play a key role in the coming war. Will you abandon me, too?"

"Will you make me wait long?"

"Wait for what, Tauriel?" He didn't understand the flow of her thoughts.

"My execution. You must make an example of me. I know that. I've dreamt of it each night since the battle, and I'm ready to return home and accept your judgment."

## Chapter 6

Thranduil gaped, stunned speechless. Galadriel's questioning of his motives made sense, now.

It wounded his pride for her to think him so cruel, but it was nothing compared to the way Tauriel's certainty and quiet acceptance of what she assumed would be his will tore a gaping hole in his heart.

"Oh, Tauriel. How did I come to fail you so badly?" Thranduil whispered, the lump in his throat choking him. "Have I ever executed one of the Elda in my Kingdom? Did I ever have any of our people harmed for standing up to me when they honestly thought I was making a mistake?"

Tauriel turned away from him, whispering, "I've never seen anyone threaten you, my Lord."

"They do not dare to threaten me, you are correct, because they are not as courageous as you." He shook his head in disbelief. "You are the only one who would follow a pack of more than two dozen Orcs to save a dying Dwarf. Or who would have the nerve to tell a King what to do and back it with absolute conviction and an arrow aimed at my heart."

The color drained from her when he mentioned the Dwarf, and Thranduil stopped to calm himself, before he continued, "Who agrees to return home expecting to die at the end of the journey? No one has that kind of strength, except you, Tauriel. And that is why I believe I have loved you ever since your apple hit my heart."

Tauriel shook her head, eyes wide, "You can't love me. I'm a lowly Silvan Elf."

"Not long ago, I would have said an Elf couldn't possibly love a Dwarf, and yet you found something in Thorin Oakenshield's nephew that struck the spark and made you burn."

Tauriel shifted in her seat, refusing to meet his eyes, again, so he wouldn't see her tears.

"Precious child, it never mattered to me you are Silvan." He kissed her cheek. "All my Elves are Silvan. If I had a problem with it, I wouldn't have allowed them to make me their King after my father died. I had the choice to walk away and leave my father's charges to fend for themselves after the war." His expression turned grim as he thought about that time and all the choices he was asked to make, but wasn't ready for.

"I could not bring myself to do it. None of the other potential replacements had any experience in leading a large group of Eldar in a dangerous time."

Tauriel was trembling, visibly, and Thranduil was at a loss for what to do about it, so he tried to attack from a different direction by asking her, "What is Legolas to you, Tauriel? A friend? More? Do you feel desire for him?"

Her eyes widened and she launched herself from the bench to stand before the fire. It was several minutes before she answered him, "He's like a brother to me. I didn't have any blood siblings, or cousins, but I came here and he took me under his wing, mentored me. I do love Legolas, but not as I should."

Thranduil nodded, smiled. "Yes, he did. And he protected you when you made mistakes."

"Is it my fault he's gone?"



“No, Tauriel, do not blame yourself. It was past time Legolas ventured beyond our borders and made a place for himself in the outside world. You did him a favor, after a fashion, by making him think about the future and what role he will be offered to play in it.”

At her unhappy frown, he added, “The Woodland Realm is not a prison, and my Eldar children are not meant to live in gilded cages, no matter how much I would like to protect them from harm. You reminded me of that quite handily.”

“What if he gets himself killed?”

“He did better against the Gundabad Orcs than I imagined he would, and certainly fared better than you.”

Tauriel turned from the fire to glare at him, and he chuckled, “Put your indignation away. I was in the healer’s tent while you screamed. I helped heal your injuries myself.” He tasted bile, again, as he remembered lifting the fur to look upon her abused body. “Are the bruises all gone?”

“Yes.”

Her words didn’t satisfy him, nor did the small glimpses of perfect skin the thrice cursed dress she was wearing revealed. Thranduil wanted to see with his own eyes, but if he slipped the thin straps off her shoulders and watched the flimsy material pool on the floor at her feet, there would be nothing to stop him from laying his fiery red-head down on the hearth rug and kissing every inch of her from her ears to her toes...

Their eyes met and Tauriel turned back to the fire, scared off by the intensity of his gaze. He could live with shyness, but he couldn’t abide her fear of him.

“I accept you seeing Legolas as brother and mentor. Does that also mean you see me as a surrogate father?” They did share a comfortable bond which allowed them to speak plainly when they were alone, openly discussing many subjects without the elven fearing censure when asking difficult questions.

Most times it was not so different from his relationship with Legolas. At other times, he and Tauriel’s discussions led to them striking sparks off each other. Each time it happened, they would retreat to a safe distance for a while, until they cooled down.

Thranduil always assumed those sparks were natural, he was male and she was female, but he wondered if it was more complicated for her than that.

It was very simple for him. He loved her and telling her as much made him feel better, like lancing a wound he’d been ignoring for too long, so it could heal.

“Sometimes.”

The King raised his eyebrows, and debated the possible outcomes of conducting a small test. “Only sometimes? What of the other times when you do not see me as the ingolemo who answers your most burning questions?”

Tauriel froze, tension stiffening her shoulders. “You are my Lord, the King.”

Thranduil hated her answer, because it was a dodge and they both knew it. She wasn’t going to be honest with him. Tauriel was going to pretend she didn’t feel the burn, and he wanted to shake her.

Instead, he stood and joined her in front of the fire, eyes searching her face. “Is that all?”

“What else could you be?” Tauriel huffed, sending a grumpy frown at him.

Oh how he loved her temper. It was the key to her soul and Thranduil was determined to turn that key and find out what lay inside her heart. Nothing would make him happier than if it was him she kept locked in her heart.

“I can think of a few possibilities... I could be your friend, you could use one and so could I with Legolas away. Or your trusted advisor. You’re a wealthy Elf with a chest of treasure from the depths of Erebor, and someone should advise you on how to invest where the money will grow and do the most good. There are many who would seek to cheat you out of your riches, if you aren’t careful.”

The King moved as if to walk to the other side of the fire, but he stopped directly behind Tauriel instead. His strong arms circled around her ribs, very gently, from behind. “Or we can admit there has always been something hot and terrifying between us.” His lips grazed the side of her neck, and her answering shudder was very satisfying.

Her head unconsciously canted to the side, offering his lips better access to her neck and shoulder. Tauriel’s teeth were worrying her lower lip.

“Deny it, Tauriel. Or our game will become something more dangerous for both of us.”

“I don’t understand.”

He nodded, pressing another kiss to her neck, this one lower than the first. “You’ve had lovers. I know you have. You know what happens when two people burn for each other.”

She groaned, “No. Please.”

“Do you think about me when you lay alone in your bed? Was it my face you saw when one of the other guards invited you to his room at Midsummer last year?”

Tauriel stepped back into him, struggled a little in his arms, but he wasn’t about to let go. A few more well placed kisses, and she sighed, “Yes. Okay, yes. I admit it.”

And just like that, Thranduil released her, let her escape his embrace. It was enough for him, for now. “I will always be your King, Tauriel, wherever you go. You can’t escape me.”

“What do you want me to do?” she asked, voice barely above a whisper.

“Come home with me, my fiery Tauriel. I will never raise a hand to you in anger. This I swear.”

“It won’t be the same as it was before I left. I’m not the same person I was then. I feel like someone else, someone older, and... my heart hurts.”

Thranduil smiled, sadly. He would miss her as a leader in his guard; she excelled in that position. “No, it won’t. It can’t. You aren’t the meek, blindly obedient Captain you were before.” He shook his head. “The Woodland Realm is already in chaos, what’s a little more? We’ll manage. Somehow. There is much to be done as we prepare for a war we did not ask for, but must fight nonetheless.”

A young servant peeked her head in and told them it was time for dinner to be served in the Main Hall.

“The hurt you feel in your heart over young Kili will get easier to bear with time.”

“You know his name.”

Thranduil shrugged, “Of course, I do. I knew all of their names.”

## Chapter 7

Dinner was little more than a blur. Tauriel couldn't say what foods they served, because she didn't think she tasted any of it.

The low rumble of the King's words, two chairs down and across the table, as he made polite conversation with the Lord and Lady and their visiting grandchildren made Tauriel's insides tie themselves into knots. The dark rumble of his voice had always had a strange magical power over her heart and body.

The twin sons of Lord Elrond of Rivendell wanted detailed accounts of the recent battle from King Thranduil, having already dragged every detail from Tauriel she could remember before the King's unexpected arrival.

For such a large battle, Tauriel's part was barely significant. She and Legolas travelled to Gundabad and discovered the second army preparing to attack, then raced back to warn everyone. The twins weren't quick to judge her, as she'd expected they would be, but then she'd left out the part where she pointed an arrow at Thranduil's heart.

They offered her words of comfort and encouragement, praising her courage and offering sympathy for her grief.

Tonight, they teased her gently, but cheekily, about her handsome Dwarf, as they'd met Kili when Thorin's company stopped in Rivendell and both remarked at the time how pretty he was for a Dwarfling.

Tauriel felt slightly better to know she wasn't the only female who'd found the handsome Dwarf Prince... compelling.

"My father said relations between Elves and Dwarfs might never have broken down if more Dwarves were like the nephews and cousins of Thorin Oakenshield, and less like Thorin, himself."

Tauriel nodded, picking up her wine goblet to wet her suddenly dry throat. Settling the wine back on the table, Tauriel said, "When we locked them up, Kili wanted to know why I hadn't searched him, he claimed he could have anything hidden in his trousers."

The twins chuckled and Lady Arwen giggled, causing King Thranduil to pause his quiet conversation with Lord Celeborn in midsentence to throw them a puzzled look.

"What did you say to that?" Lady Arwen asked, eyes sparkling with mischief. "Did you make him take off his trousers and show you?"

Tauriel winced, shaking her head. "No. I told him I thought it more likely he had nothing at all in his trousers."

That made all the Eldar at the head table laugh. Even Lady Galadriel smiled behind her wine cup.

"Maybe you could be made the Elvish ambassador to Erebor..." Arwen suggested.

Tauriel shrugged, fully aware of Thranduil's pale eyes intent on her as she answered. "I do plan to go back to Erebor, probably in the spring. I would like to find out where Kili's mother lives, so I can give her Kili's rune stone."

“Is that what you carry in the pouch around your neck?” One of the twins, Elladan, she thought his name was, asked her.

Blushing, Tauriel nodded, “I can’t read it. I’ve never studied runes or the language of Dwarves.”

“Do you have it on you, now?” Lord Celeborn asked, surprisingly interested in the conversation of the younger Eldar at the table.

Tauriel brought up the hand she’d been resting in her lap and opened it to reveal the smooth, polished stone.

Thranduil’s eyebrows raised in surprise.

Galadriel’s eyes sparkled, and her lips turned up at the corners, almost certainly because she knew Tauriel had taken to clutching the rune stone in her hand at times when she needed comfort, since her arrival in Lothlorien.

Celeborn tilted his head to the side, “May I see it, Tauriel? I’ve seen many Dwarvish runes. Perhaps, I can decipher its meaning for you.”

The wood-elf handed it to him, reluctantly, and the ancient Elf-lord studied it for some moments in silence, frowning at it and turning it over and over in his fingers while his mind searched for the translation.

With a satisfied nod, his eyes came up and found hers, but his expression was grim as he said, “Few things in the Dwarf languages have direct translations, but I am fairly certain it says, ‘Return to me’.”

Tauriel pinched her lips together, frowning and struggling not to let the tumult she was feeling inside show to those around her. All eyes were on her, in any case, so she explained, “His mother made him promise he would come home to her.”

“Oh,” Arwen breathed, going as pale as Tauriel felt. “That is... heartbreaking. His poor mother...”

“May I see the rune stone, Tauriel?” Lady Galadriel asked her. “I can’t say I’ve ever seen that particular color of stone. It’s quite beautiful.”

Tauriel nodded, mostly because she was too choked up to speak.

She watched as the Lady turned the stone over in her hands, examining and tracing the veins in the rock with her fingertip. “It feels like it is from very deep within the earth. It gives off a soothing vibration.”

Galadriel raised it as if she was going to press her lips to it, and instead muttered something Tauriel couldn’t quite hear.

Tauriel happened to be looking at Thranduil in that instant and she noted his smirk, which she assumed was because he had been close enough to hear what Galadriel said to the stone.

She vowed to ask him about it later.

“My Lord, I was wondering if I might borrow your archers tomorrow for a small competition,” the other twin, Elrohir, asked of King Thranduil. “If you are planning to stay the day in Lothlorien.”

Thranduil’s eyebrows drew together and he tilted his head to the side, considering. “What sort of

competition?”

“A friendly sort of challenge. We’ve set up a speed draw course at the archery range and I’ve never had the pleasure of testing my aim against that of our Silvan cousins.”

Lady Arwen turned her brilliant smile on the King, “They are quite proud of their training course. Please, say you’ll consider it.”

Her hand was still resting on the table and Elladan touched the callouses on her fingers left by the bowstring. “You are an archer, Tauriel, you must join in as well,” Elladan stated, making eye contact with her King, and then turning a charming, flirtatious smile in her direction.

Rather than return the flirtation as he was expecting, Tauriel blanched and stammered, “I don’t have a bow... it was... broken, during the battle.”

The air in the room grew too thick, she couldn’t seem to get any of it to go into her lungs, no matter how she struggled to breathe.

It wasn’t the first panic attack Tauriel experienced since Lady Galadriel brought her to Caras Galadhon, by any means, but having King Thranduil at the table with her, watching her fall apart, only made the anxiety more severe.

The King’s face swam before her vision, the murderous rage of Thranduil days before superimposing itself over the deep concern on his face now and Tauriel whimpered and drew herself into a fetal position in her chair, face buried against her knees as she sought to protect herself from him.

“I didn’t mean to upset her,” Elladan said, quietly. “I should have realized it was too soon after her injuries for her to even consider picking up a weapon.”

Thranduil’s deep bass voice answered him, “This isn’t your fault, it’s mine.”

Strong arms scooped Tauriel up from her chair and carried her, to where she didn’t know, until she was sitting on her bed sobbing into Lady Galadriel’s shoulder like a pitiable child.

“Give us a moment, please,” Galadriel told someone Tauriel couldn’t see.

The door to her room closed with a solid thump.

Galadriel lifted her chin and peered into her eyes, worry and compassion making her own eyes damp. Then, she was pressing something hard into Tauriel’s palm and closing her hand tight around it.

Kili’s rune stone.

As quickly as the attack came on, the waves of choking panic subsided. Her eyes widened as Tauriel looked down and opened her hand to peer the stone in confusion and dismay. “Why do I feel better? It’s never done that before.”

Lady Galadriel smiled up at her from under her lashes, knowingly. “I may have added some small anti-anxiety magic to the stone when I was examining it.” She ran her thumb along Tauriel’s tear streaked cheekbone. “Had you been holding it when my grandson asked you to join the archery competition, you might not have experienced the panic attack at all.”

“It’s never been so bad before,” Tauriel whispered, ashamed of herself.

Galadriel kissed her forehead, tenderly. "I know, child. You must give yourself time. I imagine facing down Thranduil's sword was a terrifying experience for you." She tutted, but her displeasure was not directed at Tauriel. "There is no shame in being afraid or in experiencing a moments of panic after your first battle."

Tauriel's hand convulsed around Kili's rune. "He said he forgives me."

"And he does."

"He said he... lo... loves me," Tauriel managed to get the words out, but she shuddered.

"Oh, I'm fairly certain everyone in the Main Hall is well aware of King Thranduil's feelings for you after his tender display just now." Galadriel smirked. "If you are good girl, and eat everything on the tray I am having sent up for you, I might just let you see for yourself in my Mirror."

The wood-elf didn't understand, and she said as much, to which Galadriel just smiled enigmatically and patted her arm.

"Time will tell. For now, my grandsons are going to feel terribly if you won't at least consider competing with them in the target practice tomorrow. If it is a bow you require, young Tauriel, we have twice as many bows in the armory as Eldar to wield them. I'm sure we can find one that will fit you for the day's contest."

"They must think me a complete fool."

"No. I know their natures well and the twins feel nothing but compassion in their hearts for a warrior who suffered much in her first taste of war. Tell me, did you ever take a tumble from a horse as a child?"

Tauriel scowled and nodded, "Too many times."

"What did the horsemaster do when you fell?"

"Oh." Then, Tauriel gasped, the realization dawning on her. "He made me get back on and do the drill again." She nodded her understanding, "Elladan was offering me a chance to get back on the horse."

"In a safe and nurturing environment," added Galadriel, patting her arm. "The exercise will be good for your healed body. I didn't tell them you'd faced Thranduil down over the fate of the Dwarves in Dale. It was not something they needed to know."

Shame flushed Tauriel's cheeks.

"They will not think less of you for making your King stand his ground. If I know them, they will think much more of you."

"But..."

Her objection was cut short by the arrival of her dinner tray, which Lady Galadriel placed at her side, on the bed. The food smelled so good, Tauriel's stomach grumbled.

"Trust me, Tauriel. You must eat, and then I think fair King Thranduil has some more groveling at your feet he would like to do, before you retire for the night."

"He wouldn't."

“I’m not letting him in until your soup and bread are gone. I’m also giving you a flagon of strong wine. If anyone deserves a small libation, it is you.” Galadriel glanced back over her shoulder at Tauriel. “Thranduil is an ellon, like any other. If he says something stupid, you can always yell and throw the wine at his fool head.”



## Chapter 8

Her tray was empty and Tauriel was left wondering if what Lady Galadriel said was true.

Was Thranduil really just like any other Eldar male? Tauriel never thought of him in such simple terms.

Kili described the stars being cold and remote to him, but at the time, Tauriel had thought such a description more appropriate for Thranduil.

Nothing touched him. No one dared.

King Thranduil was ancient among the Eldar of Middle Earth, and even more so among the Silvan population in Mirkwood. Their respect was mingled with a powerful amount of awe that bordered on reverence.

All knew he had seen many terrible things. Kinslayers. Exile. Dragons. Thousands of years of wars. His people could only speculate in hushed tones on how many battles Thranduil had participated in during his life.

How many deaths had he witnessed? Could they even be counted?

Tauriel had called him loveless, as she blocked his retreat from the battle, and it had enraged him more than her threats with her weapon.

In return, Thranduil mocked her feelings for Kili, asking if her love was something she would die for. Tauriel discovered soon enough that it was, but in the end, Kili had died for her, first. Though, she might have died of her injuries, too.

Nothing about that day made any sense, especially the King healing her injuries himself.

Thranduil's violent slash with his sword had reduced her bow to broken sticks and useless string with terrifying ease, but the tip hadn't even grazed her. The ancient blade would cut her in half more easily than any Orc, but instead, he merely held it to her throat while he raged at her.

Had Legolas not interceded on her behalf, would she have felt Elven forged steel cut her flesh? Would it have come to that?

The door opened and Tauriel didn't hold anything back, "Why didn't you just cut me down? Why did you destroy my bow and not me with it?!"

Thranduil stiffened in surprise at the pure force of her anger. "I told you why," he whispered, closing her door behind him by stepping back into it.

"I don't believe you," Tauriel growled. "If I wasn't good enough to love your son, I'm certainly not good enough to love you."

The Elf-king came forward until he towered over the bed and Tauriel had no place to retreat to. Her whole body shook, but she faced off with him, unblinking, her anger consumed the fear and added fuel to it.

"Tauriel. Maira. Even your verbal arrows never miss their mark, and when you said I have no love in me, you were very nearly right. There is no love in me, except for my son... and you, because I

can't bear it." He shook his head, sadly. "My beloved Queen died and most of me died with her. There is duty and responsibility, but no contentment, no happiness, no hope. Not since my Queen was taken from me. It hurt so much losing her."

Thranduil sighed, "The light went out, Tauriel. What do I care if Sauron's shadow returns and swallows the whole of everything, when it already took the only thing I had that gave me joy?"

"You have Legolas," Tauriel reminded him, quietly.

He paced the span of the room, back and forth, like a caged predator, every movement gracefully hinting at the powerful body under his robes. "And if Legolas had never been born, if he had not needed me, I would have faded long ago. Let someone else wear the crown. It is a slow acting acid eating away at what little is left of my fëa."

"Why are you here in Lothlorien, my Lord? What do you want from me?"

Thranduil sat down very gently on the edge of her bed and took her small hands in his much larger ones. "The palace has never been as cold as it was this week, as dark. Our people are being washed away in a river of tears and blood. Before he left, Legolas couldn't bear to look at me. Fitting, as I haven't been able to look at myself in many hundreds of years."

"You are cold. Distant." Tauriel stated, and then wished she could take it back, because she could see in his eyes her pronouncement, the judgment behind it, wounded him.

Thranduil brought her hand to his lips, kissing her knuckles. "You are fire, Tauriel, heat and light in the darkness. I didn't realize how much I was depending on your light, until it was fading in the healer's tent. I saved you."

Tauriel nodded, agreeing with what he'd said.

"You've had so little opportunity for joy in your life, Tauriel. My choices, made long ago, robbed you of your parents' love and guidance, as they did now in the battle for Erebor. I've created a new generation of widows and orphans with my selfishness and greed."

Tauriel swallowed hard, because she hadn't thought of it. Her focus had been on Kili and the Dwarves. Their army hadn't marched to war since her parents died. "How many have we lost?"

Thranduil's eyes glittered with tears that threatened to fall. "Many hundreds, maybe a thousand. I've only been given rough estimates by our healers and the Captains who survived, but I saw the bodies on the ground, counted too many of them."

"If our army had not been in position, Erebor would have fallen in a matter of minutes. We had to fight, my Lord. This was only the beginning of something much bigger, much worse."

Thranduil's shoulders slumped in defeat. "As I have been told by Mithrandir, Dain, that fool Man, Bard, and Lady Galadriel all in the last week. Necessity doesn't make it any less a tragedy and a shameful waste of our people. Mandos can't have them, Tauriel, they are mine!" he snarled through clenched teeth.

"Yes, my Lord," the wood-elf nodded.

The King turned and looked back at her. "You lived six hundred years in my home, content with the way things were, and then just like that, you were gone... off to save your love. I was too afraid of loving someone, again, to admit I wanted you for myself." Then, he shuddered as he whispered, "Love is like Dragon Fire. I don't think I have your courage to face it and feel it's burn again."

Tauriel hissed at him through clenched teeth, “You speak again and again of my courage, but you don’t see how mistaken you are! I’m afraid of everything!”

The King met her eyes. “So am I,” he confessed in a hoarse whisper.

In that moment, Tauriel felt like someone had punched her in the gut. She knew love existed between them, as the King warned her.

Thranduil’s admission, the raw vulnerability of such a profound confession, made her want to hold him. Comfort him. Soothe the pain she could see so clearly in his eyes, until the chill left him.

The wood-elf leaned into the King and kissed him, not the teasing kisses he’d been using on her, Tauriel kissed him deeply. It felt strange to initiate a kiss with someone as dominant as Thranduil, and she imagined him amused by her awkwardness.

“If you are just as afraid as I, then where does that leave any of us? Or our world? Who isn’t afraid?” she asked, solemnly.

“Perhaps, you should pose such a question to Mithradir or Galadriel.” He licked his lower lip. “I’ve no insights or other wisdom left to offer on that subject.”

Tauriel smirked, thinking about it. “It must have been a hard thing to admit, being our King.”

“Am I still your King, Tauriel?”

Her smirk turned into a small, thoughtful smile. “Are you giving me options for what you can be to me?”

“If you continue to kiss me in that manner,” Thranduil rumbled, “I might just offer you my body, my crown, and anything else that strikes your fancy.”

Tauriel’s hand clapped to her open mouth, stunned. “My Lord, you must not say such things.” She smirked, “Though, I’ve long wondered... what lies under your robes.”

“You’ve spied on me in my bath, don’t think I haven’t caught you at it, Tauriel. You know what lies beneath my robes, and it is far from nothing.” His finger caught in the strap of her dress and tugged it over her shoulder. “When I close my eyes, I see the entire length of your body covered in bruises and bloody scrapes.”

This was news to Tauriel.

Thranduil’s other hand copied the first and the top of Tauriel’s dress sagged, giving him a tempting view of her perfect breasts. “No bruises there.”

“I thought I was in the lead...” Tauriel huffed, clutching the fabric to her with her arms.

The King raised his expressive eyebrows at her, “You aren’t kissing me, yet. I’m getting impatient. My lips are cold. You could show me the bruises are all gone, and then maybe I will kiss you.”

Tauriel slipped off the bed and let the dress fall. After his eyes raked her from top to bottom, Tauriel turned to show him the back of her.

“This view is... nice.”

She peered over her shoulder at Thranduil, raising an eyebrow of her own. “Nice?”

“Very nice?” He grinned and shrugged, “If you were closer...”

Tauriel advanced on him. Her hands resting lightly on his shoulders while they looked into each other’s eyes, and then she pushed him. Shoving the King down onto his back on large bed and settling herself over him.

Only then, did she give in and kiss him.

The King’s hands roamed her bare skin as they kissed. Eventually, his hands settled on cupping her bottom, kneading the smooth flesh and bring their lower bodies together in a steady, delicious rhythm against the hardness of his arousal.

Tauriel’s firm grip on his chin guided his mouth on hers, changing the angles of their lips to best suit her, until she grew frustrated by the thick brocade cloth barrier between his skin and hers. She unclasped the jeweled pin at his throat and tugged at his collar, impatient to get her hands under the fabric.

“What’s wrong?” he chided her.

“If you don’t take some of these off, I’m going to scream and throw the wine pitcher at your head, like Galadriel told me I should.”

Thranduil laughed. “Is that how she wins an argument with Celeborn? I had no she was so... spirited.”

“Please,” Tauriel pleaded.

## Chapter 9

### Chapter Summary

Warning for graphic sex. And feels. And some Elvish I should probably translate for you.

Áva sorya, Melda tár - Don't worry, Beloved king

Le melin- I love [reverential] you

Gi melin- I love [familiar] you

“Oh, very well,” Thranduil sighed with playful resignation, “but don’t think this means I’ve completely given the dominant position up to you, little Tauriel.” He rolled them, so Tauriel slipped off onto her side in the middle of the bed leaving him free to get up.

His fingers went to the fastenings on his robes, keenly aware of her eyes watching his every moment, and reveling in it. He made a show of going slowly and watching the hunger build in her expression as she was finally able to look her fill on him.

Tauriel’s eyes were fixed on his bare chest and she shuddered.

“What is it? Don’t you like what you see?” the King teased her.

Her eyes raised to meet his. “You make me feel small.”

He threw back his head and laughed, terribly amused by her observation. “You are small, Tauriel. It amazes me how you even manage to have such lovely, feminine curves when you are so delicately built and the top of your pretty head barely reaches my shoulder.” He smirked, and added a jibe, “It’s hardly a wonder Dwarves fall at your feet.”

The wood-elf bristled and glared at him.

“Are you ready to see the rest? The parts you don’t normally see beneath the bathwater?”

“I have seen those parts as well, my Lord,” Tauriel admitted, flushing a lovely shade of pink.

Thranduil removed his boots, then unfastened his trousers and let them fall away. Tauriel’s reaction, the widening of her eyes and the hitch in her breath, didn’t disappoint him. He wasn’t shy, and he was well aware of his appeal to both male and female Eldar.

His arousal stirred for Tauriel. He didn’t want anyone else; hadn’t for quite some time. His fantasies were dominated by images of long red hair and compact, lithe female bodies. “Are you sure this is what you want, sweet Tauriel? I haven’t wanted anything else for decades, but I don’t want our passion to become a regret for you.”

Tauriel held a hand out to him, whispering solemnly, “Áva sorya, Melda tár.”

Thranduil felt the burn of tears behind his eyes as he went to her. He didn’t feel deserving of being called ‘beloved King’, and as for not worrying, for tonight he would let his worries go. Tauriel

deserved a King she could respect and trust to do the right thing by her.

In this moment, he had the feisty wood-elf where he wanted her and Thranduil made good on his promise to kiss every inch of her. He worshipped her until she was drowsy and sated, and only then did he fit them together, so he could press forward into the paradise that was Tauriel's body.

"Oh," Tauriel sighed, "yes."

Thranduil was so tall and broad in the shoulders, she felt a little lost under him. His body was solid with muscle, and surprisingly heavy, but it didn't stop her from lifting her hips to take him deeper.

Her hands gripped his upper arms as he started to move within her, each thrust making her intimate muscles clench at him in an effort to keep him within her until he surged deep, again.

The look of awe on his face fill her heart with tenderness, so she captured his mouth for a kiss and tasted her pleasure. "Next time, I want to taste you, too."

His forehead fell to rest on her shoulder, "We have all night for explorations and tasting, but I fear we will have to take our pleasure in small doses. You are as tiny inside as you are out, and I don't want to hurt you."

"You do fill me," Tauriel agreed. "Don't you dare stop."

"Too much, I think, precious greedy vendë."

Tauriel stroked his hair back from his face, "I can take more," she grinned wickedly and circled her hips under him.

"Ai, Tauriel, I cannot," an edge of panic creeping into his words and the movement of his thrusts.

"Give me back the lead, then, and let me show you what I've learned with the guards who made you jealous at Midsummer."

A plaintive groan escaped him, and his hips jerked as he spent himself inside her. "Cruel, so cruel..." he grunted.

Tauriel chuckled, and pressed a kiss to his brow. "As you said, we have all night."

It was strange and disconcerting to wake in someone's arms. Tauriel didn't share her bed with anyone, as it would set a bad example to those whom she led. If someone caught her eye, she went with them and returned to her own rooms in the palace before sunrise.

Tauriel tried to move and Thranduil's arms tightened around her middle, making her narrow her eyes at him. "If I'm going to represent our archers in the contest today, I'd like to bathe and have something to eat before. It must be late morning already."

The King's grip relented. "May I join you for your bath?"

"No," she stated, firmly.

Thranduil caught her hand as she left the bed and kissed her palm. "Le melin, Tauriel," he told her.

Tauriel pulled her hand away and started to walk toward the bath, “Gi melin.” Smiling to herself, because she really did love him, and it didn’t matter that loving a King would be hard work.

Her heart seemed to have a will of it’s own.

## Chapter 10

“Tauriel, come and sit beside me,” Lady Galadriel said with a small smile, as the wood-elf approached the head table with her breakfast. It wasn’t as late as Tauriel feared when she left King Thranduil in her bed, so her bath had been long and gloriously soothing.

“My Lady,” Tauriel said, lowering her head in a respectful greeting, and tried not to wince under the Lady’s intense scrutiny. She hoped she didn’t look too poorly this morning. They hadn’t done much more than an hour’s worth of sleeping.

“I just noticed you don’t have your rune stone in your hand,” Galadriel observed.

Tauriel realized she was right, her hands were empty and she was doing fine in the bustling Hall full of hungry Eldar. “I have it. I’ve only put it away in my belt pouch.” She’d donned her cleaned and repaired leathers for the archery contest today and the pouch she’d been wearing around her neck would get in the way of shooting a bow, so she’d tucked it into the belt pouch with her eating knife and flint.

“Ah,” Galadriel said, simply. “The servants found Thranduil’s room empty this morning and his bed still made. I hope that doesn’t mean you knocked him over the head with the wine jug and left him in the woods somewhere.”

Tauriel bit her lip, but a small giggle still escaped. “No, my Lady. He was with me.” She did wince at the memory of his body settling over hers, and lowered her voice so it wouldn’t carry beyond the two of them. “And I’m afraid he’s far too heavy for me to drag all the way into the woods without help.”

“You look relaxed, refreshed. I have a feeling the tension has been a long time building between you and your King.”

Tauriel blushed and changed the subject, “May I ask you a question, my Lady?”

Galadriel nodded, “You may ask me anything you like, Tauriel.”

“Is it frightening to look into the future?” Tauriel wanted to know, but it felt strange to ask someone as important as Lady Galadriel such a personal question.

The Lady frowned, “It can be terrifying to those who aren’t prepared for what they might see, even I am not immune and I have done it for a very long time.”

“I can’t imagine you are ever frightened by anything,” Tauriel told her. “You saw the light of the Two Trees.”

Lady Galadriel gave her a patient smile, “Being born in this Age means you are blissfully unaware of the dark, terrible things lurking in every corner of our world. I’ve seen too many of those things, young one, and wish it were possible to unsee them.” She patted Tauriel’s hand on the table. “Being very old doesn’t mean less things frighten you. Just the opposite.”

Tauriel nodded, Thranduil had said much the same, but she didn’t really know if she believe it.

“You don’t believe me, of course,” Galadriel said, grimly. “So, I will tell you the most frightening thing I have ever faced and it is... the anger and censure of the Valar. When you told me of fearing the rage of King Thranduil, with his sword at your throat, I was reminded of my own fear facing



the Valar over my behavior.” She shuddered and Tauriel could only imagine what she was seeing in her mind’s eye.

The wood-elf swallowed hard.

Galadriel shook herself from her memories and smiled, “Those days are behind us both. This day awaits.”

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The twins were waiting, impatiently, for Tauriel at the archery range.

So were three of the Woodland archers Thranduil brought with him. They were polite enough to Tauriel as she approached, offering her solemn, reserved greetings.

“Are you well, Tauriel?” one of the archers asked her, in a hushed tone.

She smiled at him. “I am, very much improved. It will be good for me to use my muscles.”

A stern-faced blonde was stringing a bow for her, and he looked her up and down critically before returning to his work. “Have you reached your full height?” he asked.

“Yes,” Tauriel answered, her eyebrows raising at his strange question.

“Pity.”

“Haldir! Show better manners,” Elladan chided him. “Tauriel is a guest here.”

Haldir looked up from the bow and narrowed his eyes at them. “I am showing manners, I haven’t asked yet if all the ellith in Mirkwood are similarly the size of Woodland Sprites.” He smiled at Tauriel to let her know he was teasing.

“They aren’t,” the fourth archer, and their Captain, told him as he came around the corner and joined them at the rack of practice bows. He smiled at Tauriel, and she was relieved to see no hostility in him toward her, so far as she could tell. “Tauriel is unusually short for our ellith.”

Tauriel glared at him. “I am not,” she huffed.

“There is no shame in being of less stature,” the Captain told her.

To the sons of Elrond and Haldir, he said, “Tauriel holds her own well enough when the spiders and other dark beasts from Dul Guldur come looking for trouble.”

The corner of his mouth quirked, “We were more than a little alarmed to arrive and see her wearing a fancy dress. I wagered she’d been knocked in the head too many times during the battle and forgot she was a warrior and not a prissy who strums a lute all the day.”

Tauriel took the bow from Haldir, practically yanking it from his hands. “I only took a few knocks to my head, and I will show you all soon enough I am not a prissy.” With a disdainful sniff, she turned on her heel and went to take a few practice shots at a nearby target to get the feel of the unfamiliar bow.

“Something tells me her children are going to be much taller than she,” Elrohir commented dryly.

The Captain chuckled with the others, as word had already spread that morning of Thranduil’s untouched bed. “Yes, I think it is a safe bet.”

“I don’t know which to be more jealous of, her or the King,” Elladan added.

Tauriel called to them, “I can hear every word you say! Please have the decency to gossip about my choice of lovers, like a group of fishwives, out of the range of my hearing.”

“Did you hear that? She called us fishwives.” He and Haldir exchanged a smile. “We can’t let that stand. We must show these wood-elves we are worthy of respect.”

The challenge course had ten hay-bale stations, some on the ground, and others in more challenging locations, like the fork of a tall tree. They walked the course in pairs, shooting one on one with arrows fletched in bright colors, red for Lothlorien and blue for Mirkwood.

Tauriel was paired for the walk-through with Elrohir. He adjusted his long stride so Tauriel didn’t have to scramble to stay apace with him out of simple courtesy and not because she needed it. Or at least, that was what she told herself.

The bow was longer than she was used to and strung a bit too tightly. Tauriel almost missed the first target entirely, her first arrow stuck in the outermost ring of the five, while his arrow was in the third ring.

Her other shots were better as they went along the course. On the tenth target, their arrows were side by side at the top of the second ring.

“Not bad for a Sprite.”

Tauriel bared her teeth at him. “Easy for you to tease when you are as tall as an Ent. I don’t have to worry about leaves in my hair when I cross under tree branches,” she smirked, picking a leaf out of the side of his hair and holding it up for him to see.

“And the wood-elf scores a direct hit to ‘rohir’s vanity. Well done, Tauriel,” Elladan said.

Haldir handed her a different bow. “Try this one.” It was a bit shorter, more like her old bow. “What happened to your bow?”

Tauriel opened her mouth, and then shut it and stalked off, leaving him to stare at her retreating back in confusion.

A Mirkwood archer answered his question in a hushed tone, “The King cut it into pieces!”

This got the attention of the twins. “Why would he do that?”

“Tauriel drew down on him.”

“What? Why?”

The archers told them of Thraduil’s desire to pull his army back and leave the Dwarves and Men to die. And how Tauriel tried to stop him, at the peril of her own life.

Tauriel finished her practice shots and called to them, “Are we having a contest or not?”

“You’re with me this time, Tauriel,” Elladan told her. “And this time through the course, Noro!” As he said the word ‘run’, he sprinted off in the direction of the first target. She clutched the bow to her and took off after him.

This bow was better, not perfect, but she doubted any bow would be comfortable until she had time to break it in properly. The scores were nearly tied as the pair returned to the others, laughing and

taunting each other.

“Not bad. Not bad, at all. You’re quick and agile.”

“And you aren’t such a terrible archer for being all arms and legs.”

Elladan grinned, “I’m happier with a sword in my hand.”

“I can imagine.”

He gave her a look a thoughtful look. “You don’t have to imagine, I could demonstrate. Not on you, or course, your newly healed injuries are not up for that sort of exertion. I was thinking of someone else.”

“Who?”

“King Thranduil.”

Tauriel couldn’t help but wince.

“Did you really face him down with just your little bow?” Elrohir asked, joining them.

Tauriel shrugged, grumbling, “It was stupid.”

Elladan looked at her, expression grave, but thoughtful. “Brave.”

The wood-elf looked at him as if he’d just told her he was in love with an Orc. “Brave is very close to stupid, if not the same thing. I couldn’t save Kili. I watched him die and was powerless to stop it. I almost died right beside him. Thorin and his other nephew died, as well. I put Legolas in danger, because he felt he had to come rescue me from my stupidity. Twice.”

Elladan patted her arm, “Experience will separate the courage from the stupidity.”

## Chapter 11

The pairings for the contest had all been fairly matched and the scoring had come down to the last round between Tauriel and Haldir. The victor of that match sealed the contest.

Haldir handed her a third bow for the third round. This one was as light as a feather. It felt as if it had been made for her hand and Tauriel fell in love with it before a single shot had ever been taken. He even had the tension on the bowstring perfect.

All thoughts fell away as Tauriel took her first shot at the practice target. Her arrow hit dead center with power behind it, sinking the arrow deep. She gaped at the target, letting out a small sound of delight.

When she turned to look at him, Haldir was smirking. "This one, I like," she breathed.

"So I see."

Her hand tightened on the bow, and this time was Tauriel's turn to race into the trees. "It's time to win this contest. Catch me, if you can."

Haldir and the twins exchanged satisfied grins, before he followed Tauriel at a leisurely pace.

The pair emerged at the other side of the course in record time, with Tauriel whooping as she raced down the hill. "I beat him," the wood-elf called to the archers from Mirkwood. "It was close, but I bested him on the last two targets. Both my shots landed dead center."

The wood-elves each clasped her on the shoulder as Tauriel passed, coming to a stop before the twins, who were now standing with King Thranduil and Lady Galadriel.

Tauriel was panting to catch her breath and looked a mess, but she didn't care. "The air is different here. I need to run more."

Galadriel smiled, nodding at her assessment, "The elevation is higher and the air thinner. More running would help you to adjust. If you decide to stay, you will find your body will become accustomed to it."

Haldir sidled up to them, not winded in the least. "Tauriel vanquished me fairly. I concede defeat to the Woodland Sprite. This time."

Tauriel offered him the bow, as much as she hated the thought of parting with it, and Haldir shook his head. "You earned it. Agoreg vae," he praised her, and something told her he wasn't just speaking of their contest.

Her felt herself getting choked up, "Le fael."

"As I said, you earned it, Tauriel. Showed me up quite handily."

"Never fear, Haldir's ego will survive," Elrohir quipped.

Elladan nodded, "Turn him down for a romantic evening stroll, and do it quickly, while he is vulnerable. We may yet cure him of his excessive love of himself."

"It's good to have your teasing aimed at someone else," Tauriel sighed, rolling her eyes.

“We only tease you, because we like you, Tauriel. It is a thing siblings and comrades do to each other here, in friendship and respect.”

Elrohir nodded, adding, “You are welcome to come and stay with us in Rivendell, if your banishment isn’t lifted. Father will adore you.”

“Her banishment is over,” Thranduil confirmed. “You may come home with us, Tauriel. We will leave in the morning. You have until then to consider your plans and decide.” The uncertainty in his expression was something Tauriel had never seen before and instantly hated.

“There are many paths you could choose to walk, Tauriel. I can help you see them all more clearly, if you would like,” Lady Galadriel told her. “King Thranduil and I have been speaking of an alliance to strengthen the defenses of both our kingdoms.

And possibly an exchange of land in the future, so we will be even closer neighbors.”

Tauriel didn’t know what to say. Or what to think. It was all moving too quickly.

“My Lord,” the Captain said. “We could escort her to Rivendell.”

Thranduil narrowed his eyes at him. “If she decides that is where she wishes to live, we will speak further.” He turned and walked away, clearly unhappy.

Tauriel watched him go, and felt terrible. “You don’t have to do that. I can manage,” she told the Captain.

He had been in Thranduil’s service since the earliest years of the Third Age, and he was a mentor to her. “I thought you would hate me. Why don’t you hate me? All of you are being so kind. You know what I’ve done, and you saw me threaten our King with your own eyes. I don’t deserve your compassion.”

He looked at her and shook his head, sadly. “I was angry with you, at first. We all were, Tauriel, but not for the reasons you might think.” He pulled her over to a bench and sat her down, the twins and Lady Galadriel stepped away to give them some privacy. “You left before the King sealed the borders, but you knew he would, and it was the reason you left in such haste. Is it not?”

“Yes. I knew. He cares nothing for anyone beyond our little piece of the world.”

The Captain nodded, “Exactly. We are angry because you assumed we would try to prevent you from leaving. You went off on your own to hunt an insane number of Orcs, and you left us behind.”

“I had Legolas.”

“Legolas is Thranduil’s son, and he can get away with defying the King to a degree no one else can, but two against thirty isn’t fair odds. For all we knew, you would both get yourselves killed. You didn’t ask us to fight with you, to have your back. That was wrong of you. We are comrades, and the only family many of us have in Middle Earth. We would never let a pair of our own face danger alone.”

Tauriel tried to swallow the lump in her throat. “He would have banished you, too. Anyone who left without his blessing.”

“Maybe so. Some of us would be happier being led by someone who helps their neighbors when they are being overrun by armies of Orcs. Even if that means we take losses. It is an honorable

way to go to the Halls of Waiting. We had both a King and a Queen once and things were better. We had solid relationships with Men and other Eldar. When I was your age, I loved travelling the roads and seeing places beyond Greenwood.”

He started to say something else, and Tauriel put her hand over his mouth to stop the treasonous words from coming out. “Don’t say anything more. Please.” Her hands shook. “Whatever happens to me. Don’t say you have lost faith in our King because of me. I can’t add more shame and guilt to the burden in my heart right now.” Tears leaked from her eyes. Tauriel took the rune stone from her pouch and turned it over in her fingers. The magic made the world seem lighter and the stone itself reminded Tauriel of Kili’s smile.

“Did you really think you were the only one dissatisfied with our isolation? Many would consider leaving if given the chance.”

“I just want to go home,” Tauriel told them. “I’ve had enough of adventures. Where would you go?”

One of the other archers said, “I’d like to see Imladris. If it is anything like Caras Galadhon, it must be very beautiful and exciting.”

“You must not just leave,” Tauriel pleaded. “He will consider it a betrayal.”

“Is it, Tauriel? Or is it simply wanting to breathe air not polluted by the evil filth that has turned Greenwood the Great into Mirkwood.”

“If I had known I would not be allowed to return, I don’t think I could have walked through the gates.” She tried to find an argument in Thranduil’s favor to present. “The King says we took heavy losses. He grieves for them, I know he does care for all of us. I can see it in his eyes.”

“It is true. We lost most of the force we took to Erebor.”

“We can’t dishonor their sacrifice by abandoning the Woodland Realm when we are needed most.”

The Captain sighed, “You and the Dwarves showed us it is possible to walk away, but we will return with you and speak no more of this subject today.”

“I’ve missed you,” she admitted, hugging him.

“Thranduil wouldn’t let us add you to our laments. He was certain you weren’t dead.”

“He was right.”

“You surviving will be the one light in this dark time, Tauriel.”

## Chapter 12

The ring of blades in the distance made Tauriel start. The archers looked at each other and took off running in the direction of the sound. Tauriel was with them all the way to clearing where they skidded to a halt, finding not Orcs or spiders but the sons of Elrond shirtless and sparring an equally shirtless King Thranduil in the large clearing.

When Elladan suggested fighting Thranduil, she had no idea he was serious. The sound was as jarring to Tauriel as the spectacle of them all half dressed and circling each other, swords slashing and muscles rippling.

Something told her this was another attempt to help her overcome her emotional and mental trauma, but it only made her feel dizzy and nauseous. Each time it looked like someone was going to get hurt, she flinched. More than once, Tauriel looked away to regain her composure.

The demonstration went on for quite some time and eventually Tauriel's nerves grew accustomed to it. The twins had skill, she had to give them that, but Thranduil fought with a fluid grace Tauriel found mesmerizing. The King was truly beautiful, and she felt herself growing flushed as the sheen of perspiration on his skin reminded Tauriel of the previous night.

By the time they stopped, by mutual agreement, Tauriel wanted nothing more than to drag her King back to her room and ravish him. He seemed to have similar ideas, because he approached her with an answering heat in his eyes.

Thranduil pulled the loose tunic over his head, drawing her eyes to his chest. Once he was covered, he offered her his hand, "Will you walk with me, Tauriel?"

"Of course, my Lord."

"We should speak of your future, before you go with Galadriel to look into her mirror."

Tauriel dreaded the conversation, and when they were out of earshot of the others, she asked him, "Can't we just go back to my rooms and throw ourselves on the bed and not come out until tomorrow?"

The King laughed. "I like your idea better than mine, but you have to give me the chance to convince you to return home."

"There is nothing I want more than to go home. It is what I will do once we get there that terrifies me. If I am not a Captain in your guard, what does that leave for me? I don't know how to be anything else."

Thranduil stopped and studied her. "You know more than you think, Tauriel. We will find a new place for you. As long as it doesn't keep you too far from me, the only thing of importance is that you are happy."

"I fear I've started an avalanche of discontent with my rash actions. I swear to you I never meant for it to happen."

He nodded, "I know. You were following your heart, not inciting a rebellion. I've been blind to the discontent of the Silvan elves for too long. It is going to take time to regain their trust and confidence."

“We can do it,” Tauriel stated firmly. “There must be a way to protect everyone and have contact with the outside world. Why does it have to be a choice between two extremes? There must be middle ground we can find.”

Thranduil regarded at her, his expression intense. “Spoken like a Queen.”

She shook her head, panic welling inside her. Had Thranduil heard what his own guard had said? “I don’t want to be anyone’s Queen, I swear. I don’t want people to look to me for their answers. I’m not wise or experienced enough to lead anyone.”

“You led well as a Captain. Though you are young, the guards respect you and trust your judgement. Compromise has never been a strength of mine. Neither has suffering fools. I need you to do that for me. Will you be my peacemaker, Tauriel? You are the embodiment of trust and compassion and honesty. I need those things from you. With you at my side, working together as partners, we can succeed where I’ve floundered and failed on my own.”

Tauriel considered a partnership with Thranduil, but she didn’t know how something like that would work, so she asked.

“It’s quite simple. I marry you, and you become my Queen. You will be my wife, my lover, my most trusted advisor, as you should be. There is nothing complicated about it. Except perhaps children. You do want children, don’t you, Tauriel?”

The wood-elf felt the room grey around the edges of her vision. Wife. Queen. Children. Tauriel felt another panic attack coming on, but she managed to say through clenched teeth, “I’m Silvan, my Lord. You can’t possibly be serious.”

The King pulled her into his arms and held her to his chest, “I’ve never been more serious, Tauriel, but I won’t push. Patience is something I do have. We can move slowly, small steps so you won’t feel faint or go into a fit of anxiety.” He pulled back and cupped her face in his hands. “I think a Silvan Queen would be very well received if the Queen was you, Tauriel.”

“I’m not important.”

“You are vital to me. Essential.”

“Why?”

Thranduil regarded her for a moment. “Because I’ve fallen in love with you, and I refuse to let you slip away.”

He pressed her back against the trunk of a large oak tree, then lifted Tauriel’s body so her legs and arms circled him while they kissed. He claimed her lips over and over, holding her off the ground as if she weighed nothing at all and they had all the time in the world to simply share sweet kisses.

Her fingers tangled in his hair, tugging his head this way and that while she pressed her lips to his face and neck. Thranduil responded in kind, lips finding the spots he knew made her shudder and squirm with pleasure and arousal.

“I think we should find a room, before I take you in this very spot curious eyes and gossips be damned.”

“Your room is closer,” Tauriel panted.

Thranduil shifted her, lifting her up and over his shoulder until her bottom was pointed to the sky



and her forehead hung over his back and bumped his ribs with each of his strides. "I can walk, you know," Tauriel objected.

"We are conserving your strength for more important tasks." There was smugness and amusement in his words.

Tauriel wanted to smack him, but she couldn't manage it while being held upside down. "This is shamefully undignified, my Lord. I am not a sack of potatoes being loaded into a cart."

"Any witnesses will not be remarking on your loss of dignity, Tauriel. They'll be too busy watching your pretty little bottom waving in the air and thinking how completely underserving I am of such a gift." To illustrate, he gave her backside a playful smack with his free hand. "I'm wondering if your pert backside will be as appreciative of my talents as the rest of you. Shall we find out?"

Quickly enough, Tauriel was convinced, and there were more skills she never imagined the King possessed. His fingers were as wicked and clever as his tongue, and he knew how to use both to best advantage. Her body had no secrets left by the time they finished and climbed into the bath to prepare for dinner. Thranduil couldn't seem to stop smirking at her with more male smugness than Tauriel thought their afternoon in bed deserved.

"Stop it," the wood-elf grumbled.

Thranduil raised an eyebrow at her. "What?"

"You're smirking, again, my Lord."

"I'm not allowed to bask in the glory of the moment? I've waited so long to have a taste of your passion, I can't help but feel smug."

Tauriel rolled her eyes and sighed.

"You should be feeling equally accomplished. I can barely walk from exhaustion. You've drawn every last drop of strength from me."

Her lips curled into a small smile. "I can think of other last drops I've fully drained from you, as well."

"It could take days to recover."

"Am I supposed to feel sorry for you?" Tauriel teased him, and it felt good.

Thranduil sighed, "Yes."

"I don't. Not a bit. But I am famished and thirsty."

"A positive sign your body is recovering from all the abuse."

Tauriel stepped out of the water and dried herself with a long soft length of cloth. "I wish we could have trays brought up to us."

His eyes were on her breasts as he said, "I'm sure something could be arranged."

"Never mind. I'm leaving this room before you pounce on me, again." She slipped a new dress, pale yellow like fresh butter, over her head and smoothed it over her hips. "You've got that look in your eye. I'm almost certain it means you want more sex. I will be safer if I'm in a room full of

people.”

“I wouldn’t count too heavily on having them save you. You’ve grown up very sheltered to the customs of other Eldar. The Lord and Lady would probably enjoy watching, if I spread you out on the Head Table and devoured you instead of their food.”

“You wouldn’t,” Tauriel hissed.

Thranduil eyed her body in it’s clinging, revealing dress. “Perhaps, perhaps not. Don’t tease me, or we might find out. I think maybe I shouldn’t have been so quick to discard some of the old ways...”

He had Tauriel’s curiosity awakened, now. “What ways?”

“More traditional views of Eldar celebrations, ones which included celebrating sensuality and intimacy.”

Her jaw dropped. “No. No. No.”

“Spoilsport.”

She’d heard stories of other groups of Eldar and their feast days. Tauriel wasn’t as sheltered as Thranduil thought. “I am not encouraging anyone to shed their clothes and share their bodies anywhere the mood takes them.”

“It could be fun. Or, at the very least, inspiring.”

Tauriel huffed and scurried into the bedroom to find her slippers, so she could depart before Thranduil left the bath.

“Run, little Tauriel. I’ll have fun catching you, again, later.”

## Chapter 13

Tauriel approached the basin tentatively, unsure of what she would see and if she even wanted to see it.

Lady Galadriel stood across the pedestal from her. "You are safe, child. The Mirror cannot harm you, and I will be here with you, guiding you. Do not fear."

Her words gave Tauriel the resolve she needed to look down into the water.

*Thranduil stepped carefully around the body of one of his swordsmen, his expression one Tauriel had never seen before, blind panic... fear.*

*Blood trailed from a shallow cut on his forehead, and another small cut on the bridge of his nose left a trail to the corner of his mouth.*

*His eyes scanned the faces as he passed each of them, searching for someone among the bodies of the wounded, the dying and the dead. Something caught his eye and he went down to his knees hard beside the next cot as if his legs had been cut out from under him by an Orc's blade.*

*Thranduil touched the cheek of the elven woman and she turned her head a fraction to look at him. Her lips moved and she licked at them to wet them. Her lips moved a second time, and this time, he heard her last breath escape her with a sigh, "Legolas."*

*The King threw back his head and howled at the sky, "No!"*

*Sobs wracked his shoulders, and he bellowed again, the same word, "No." A simple denial, testament to the rage and helplessness he faced at the loss of his beloved wife.*

"I never imagined. It was wrong of me to say there is no love in him. Cruel." Tauriel stepped back from the basin. Tears wet on her cheeks.

"Words spoken in the heat of the moment are the most likely to accidentally find their mark. And to cause the most pain," Galadriel told her. Her head nodded to the water, "There is more. Look."

*"My Lord!" the Captain of the guard said, rushing up the twisting path to stand before the throne. "An army of Orcs marches on Lothlorien from the north."*

*Thranduil looked down at the guard, "Triple the patrols along the river. Kill any filth that tries to cross into our lands."*

*"As you say, my Lord. But, will we not send aid? They are Eldar, and their need is great..."*

*The King glared at him, and he withered under the icy regard. "No, we will not. They have a Ring of Power to protect them. We have only our swords and arrows."*

The image wavered.

*"My Lord..." the Captain of the guard's voice faltered.*

*"What is it, now?" Thranduil sneered.*

*The Captain flushed and stammered, “Uhm, I don’t know how to say this, my Lord, but the battle does not go well and a large group of our people have taken up arms and are massing on the edge of the river, preparing to cross and fight...”*

*The King’s eyes grew wide, “They are doing what?! Did they not receive my orders?”*

*“They did, my Lord, I swear it.” He faced the King’s fury. “What do we do? Surely, we will have to send aid now.”*

*Thranduil’s jaw clenched in impotent fury. “Let them go.”*

*“But my Lord...”*

*“I said let them go! Are you deaf? Or merely stupid?”*

*The Captain winced, and backed away, “I apologized my Lord.”*

*Thranduil stood and made his way down the steps of his throne. “Get out. All of you get out.”*

*When he was alone, Thranduil looked out across the vast caverns of his palace and bellowed. The sound of his rage and despair echoed to all corners of the palace.*

Tauriel realized she was clutching the ring of stones around the basin to steady herself and dropped her hand.

“Of course, they would want to render aid,” she whispered. “We are Eldar, too.” Her eyes were drawn to Galadriel. “What is this? It must be the future, but I hate it.”

Lady Galadriel’s forehead creased, “A possible future. One of an infinite number of possibilities spreading out like the branches of a tree. In this future, you came to us, and I healed you. When you were well, you left us and chose to go North in the hopes of finding the King’s son. Thranduil knew nothing of your visit, until after you had gone. He was angry we didn’t detain you. There was no tender reconciliation between you and your King. No confessions of love or bonds of friendship formed. Only a lonely Monarch holding a grudge against us for treating you kindly and compassionately. Lothlorien would withstand this siege, enraging Thranduil further, and when the time came for him to face the armies of evil in his own lands... Thranduil refuses our offers for aid, bars the return of his exiles to defend their homes, and Mirkwood... falls.”

“No,” Tauriel breathed. “I believe what you say, my Lady, for it sounds very much like my King, but I refuse to allow such a thing to come to pass. Not while I am alive.”

The Lady smiled at her, “Good.”

The basin’s water shimmered and reformed into a new scene: the familiar rooms Tauriel called home in the palace.

*“What is... that?” Thranduil asked, incredulous.*

*Tauriel looked down at the small child in her arms and pressed a kiss to his chubby cheek, pointedly ignoring the King’s rude exclamation and his entering her rooms without announcing himself.*

*“Why do you have a child? Where is it’s mother?” the King demanded. He seemed shocked by the*

*presence of the small person, more than anything.*

*“This child has a name. His name is Nekolas, and his mother is attending to healing an injured farmer. His father is on guard duty until dawn. I didn’t have plans tonight, so I told them I would take care of him until they returned.”*

*Thranduil strode across her sitting room and settled himself in a chair across from where Tauriel and Nekolas lounged on a large blanket on the floor. “He’s leaking.”*

*Tauriel looked down at the boy and patted the drool from his chubby chin with a soft rag. “He’s cutting a new tooth. Drool is normal.”*

*“I was hoping we could go for a walk tonight.”*

*“As you can see, my Lord, I have another who needs my attentions tonight.”*

*Thranduil eyed the child, “He’s rather large for an infant. He looks more like a small, hairless Dwarf.”*

*Tauriel gasped, appalled at the comparison. “Nekolas is no hairless Dwarf. Are you?” She cooed at him. “Tell the mean old King you are nearly two years since your Begetting Day, and a year out of your mother’s womb. You are no infant at all, and soon you will walk off all the chubby rolls on your legs. Then, you won’t look like a Dwarf.” She pulled him up from sitting on his bottom and set him to balancing on his feet, holding his hands while he took tentative, wobbly kick steps. “See? You will walk in no time.”*

*Nekolas cooed back at her smiling face and squealed with delight, a river of drool leaking from between his two bottom teeth.*

*Tauriel hugged Nekolas to her, laughing and offering him praises in Sindarin.*

*“That reminds me,” Thranduil said. “Next week is Midsummer.”*

*Tauriel rolled her eyes. “No.”*

*“Are you, at least, considering it?”*

*The wood-elf sighed, “Of course, I considered it.”*

*“And your answer is still no?”*

*“Do not speak to me of babies, my Lord,” Tauriel huffed. “You brought the widowed families and a handful of orphans to winter here in the palace. It’s been chaos around here.”*

*Thranduil’s eyebrows raised at her tone of voice. “I happen to like most of them. Especially the ones who aren’t yet capable of impertinent speech. I was thinking of letting them stay, if they want to.”*

*His voice lowered, “I used to dream about touching you, holding you. Now, I’ve started to dream of your belly rounding with my child.”*

*“I’ve dozens of new archers to train and a trade delegation to Rivendell to plan. I’m far too busy to be thinking about babies.” She lowered her voice and moderated her tone, “I know why you are doing this, Thranduil. You are missing Legolas; I miss him, too. There is no shame in admitting it. So, write him a letter. Send a messenger North to fetch him home. We could use his help.”*

*Nekolas lost interest in sitting with Tauriel and rolled himself onto his belly. He got up on all fours and crawled across the distance to where the King was sitting. He drooled on Thranduil's boot as he pulled himself up to a standing position, gripping a pant leg with plump fingers. He wobbled and would have fallen backward if Thranduil hadn't caught him and steadied him.*

*Thranduil frowned at the boy. "You are surprisingly good with children."*

*"I might be more open to the idea of making babies of our own, if you made an effort to be nicer to our trade partners, instead of trying to make them loathe you and beg for me to lead the negotiation," Tauriel teased him. "And besides, you haven't married me. Legolas would be horrified to return home to me pregnant and unwed."*

*The King blinked at her. "I... uhm..."*

*"How does it feel to have the tables turned on you, oh mighty King?" Tauriel chuckled. "I can be demanding, too." She bared her teeth at him. "You want babies? Marry me first."*

*"Fine," Thranduil huffed. "It would seem you've gotten over your reticence to be my Queen." He picked the squirming boy up and walked across the floor to hand him back to Tauriel. "I'll have the preparations for the feast..."*

*"Not yet," Tauriel yelped. "I didn't say we should do it now..."*

*Thranduil tilted his head, and smirked. "You do realize you just agreed to marry me, and to have my child."*

*She glared at him, eyes flashing as she said, "Was this your plan all along?"*

*"Yes," he admitted, chuckling.*

*Tauriel glared at him, "Why am I continually shocked by how devious you can be?"*

*"Unfair character assassination," Thranduil sniffed. "Devious implies deception, and I have made no effort to hide my desires, or my intentions. It is hardly my fault I am forced to resort to drastic measures to counter your stubbornness."*

*Tauriel's eyes widen in disbelief, "My stubbornness? You dare call me stubborn!"*

*"It is one of the things I love most about you, Maira."*

*"Get out. Out. OUT." She pointed at the doorway. "When Nekolas' mother comes for him, I'm going to make you pay for calling me stubborn."*

*Thranduil smiled. "I look forward to it, Tauriel."*

*The Mirror's vision faded and Tauriel grinned. "This future, I like."*

*Lady Galadriel nodded, "You are good for Thranduil. You bring light back into his heart."*

*"I'm too young to have a child."*

*The Lady of Lothlorien offered her a small smile, "You would do well to save that for your final argument, as a plea of youth will hold the most sway with Thranduil. He will respect your caution. Lead him a merry chase until you feel you can be the mother your children deserve."*

“Children? We will have more than one? Can the mirror show me?”

Galadriel gave an elegant shrug, “If I showed you, it would take all the fun out of it.” She walked around to stand before Tauriel. “Dark times are coming, Tauriel. The carnage you witnessed is just the beginning. We’ve made the Dark One angry and desperate. A cornered animal is the most dangerous. It will be hard to hold onto hope. Take what joy you can in the quiet moments. Temper your King’s wisdom with compassion, mercy.”

Tauriel nodded, “I’ll try.”

“You are the only one who can succeed. Stand proudly beside Thranduil and hold your head high. You said it yourself, all Eldar are kin. And equal in the eyes of our Creator, but different in our strengths and weaknesses. We need our Woodland kin to help us remember what it is to love and hope without reserve.”

Tauriel swallowed hard, whispering in disbelief, “My people really would turn their back on the King’s rule.”

“It wouldn’t be the first time some have become discontented, child. You are not to blame, but you can be King Thranduil’s salvation.”

“I love him,” Tauriel confessed.

“Mithrandir told me it is kindness and love that will defeat the Darkness.” Lady Galadriel smiled at her, “When he speaks, we would all do well to listen.”

## Chapter 14

### Chapter Summary

Last chapter before the epilogue, my two final chances to hit you right in the feels.

Thranduil waited impatiently in the guest sitting room for Tauriel to return from her viewing with Galadriel.

Celeborn kept him company, speaking in low tones. "The White Council was able to force the Necromancer from Dul Guldur. Elrond and Galadriel both believe it was the disembodied spirit of Sauron himself leading the ghostly enemy."

The King didn't know if he believed in a ghostly enemy, but he was listening. "If they drove the evil out of Dul Guldur, where did it go?"

Celeborn frowned. "We believe the last hold the Dark One has in Middle Earth is Mount Doom itself, and we've sent word to the Steward of Gondor to be watchful and report any activity to us."

"I would like to believe the evil is fled from Dul Guldur, for the sake of my people, but I am slow to trust in anything which is accomplished in a single day."

"Galadriel cannot say how long she thinks the evil will stay away. We must all be vigilant. The war is coming and the stakes may very well be all or nothing... for all the peoples of Middle Earth."

The King tapped his chin, thoughtfully. "Tauriel and those who agree with her are not going to allow me shut the gates and ignore the threats to other lands any longer."

"The young are eager to see action, of course. Once they've been given a first taste of the bitterness of battle, I doubt they will be so quick to rush toward war as they would have been. Your children have witnessed carnage with their own eyes."

"True. It is my hope to convince them careful preparation and vigilance are the keys to our survival."

Celeborn smiled. "Tauriel is an interesting choice for a lover, or a second Queen."

"I fear if she decides to leave, to live her life somewhere outside of our forest home, a mass exodus will follow Tauriel whether she wants them dogging her heels or not."

The Elf-lord tilted his head, listening to the words Thranduil was not saying. "This Age is drawing to a close. If she leads them anywhere, young Tauriel would do well to take them home to the Undying Lands."

The blood drained from his face, and Thranduil felt as though Celeborn had kicked him in the guts. "Valinor?" he whispered, incredulous.

"The Age of the Eldar guiding and watching over Middle Earth is drawing to an end. We are all called home," Galadriel told him, appearing at the door to the sitting room with Tauriel a step



behind her.

Thranduil barely heard her words. His entire focus was on Tauriel, half hidden behind Galadriel, her face pale and tired. “Tauriel... are you well?”

Lady Galadriel put an arm around Tauriel’s slim shoulders and guided her forward to stand before Thranduil. It was an effort not to snatch her to him and hug her until she couldn’t draw breath.

“Tauriel has seen the past and two pieces of possible futures. I think she is ready to choose accept destiny. We will leave you, now, and let her ponder the paths laid out for her in peace.”

Tauriel nodded, “Thank you, my Lady. For the opportunity, and your hospitality, I owe you more than I can ever hope to repay.”

Galadriel smiled at her and pressed a tender kiss to her forehead. “If you can convince your Lord to accept our offers of alliance and trade, we are more than repaid, Tauriel.”

The Lord and Lady disappeared, leaving them alone.

Tauriel launched herself into his arms, clinging. “Hold me,” she whispered into his shoulder.

It was a request Thranduil wouldn’t dream of denying her.

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In the morning, a large group gathered at the base of the massive tree to bid their guests farewell.

Lady Arwen hugged Tauriel fiercely. “Travel safe, Tauriel. You must come and visit us, again. Maybe in the fall...”

“Yes,” Elladan added, pressing a kiss to her cheek. “We would be honored to have you as our guest in Rivendell, as well.” He grinned at her. “You should bring more Silvan ellith with you. We have more ellyn than we have ellith by nearly two to one.”

Elrohir pressed his kiss to her lips, earning a warning growl from King Thranduil.

Tauriel broke the kiss and gave him a friendly shove to the shoulder, but it didn’t move him even a step. “I can guess why your ellith are in short supply,” she teased him. “You’ve scared them off.”

“We will not be trading our Eldar with you,” Thranduil stated firmly.

Lord Celeborn surprised Tauriel by placing a kiss on her forehead. “Be well, child,” he told her.

Lady Galadriel hugged her briefly and kissed her cheek.

Saying goodbye to the Lord and Lady was harder than Tauriel expected. She’d been without parents, or even close kin, for a long time. The support and advice Lady Galadriel and Lord Celeborn offered during her stay made her keenly aware of the void in her life.

“I have few memories of my parents, my Lady. I’d like to think they were much as you and Lord Celeborn are: kind, generous and wise.”

The pair smiled at her, pleased by the compliment she paid them.

Celeborn spoke, "Too many parents and their children have been parted. We have fostered many across the Ages, and loved them no less than the one elleth we were given by the grace of Ilúvatar. If you have need of us, young Tauriel, we will send aid, or you may come here."

Tauriel lowered her head and touched her forehead in respect.

Her eyes were damp as her horse carried her out of the city and down the path that led to the river and home.

The journey passed quickly, though Tauriel scanned the forest constantly. Each movement of tree or rustle of leaves reminded her of how far yet she had to come before she would be free of the nagging anxiety the battle had instilled in her.

It wasn't until she dismounted the horse and crossed the bridge that the weight of the world seemed to fall on her. Tauriel stood at the gate and her feet refused to move. So many things, so many images from the last few weeks, assaulted her.

The King turned back to see why she was no longer behind him. In three steps, he was before her, eyes searching her face. "Come, Tauriel, we are home." His hand found the pouch at her hip and warm fingers pressed the rune stone into her hand. "I will have a bath prepared and supper brought to you."

Tauriel nodded, numb.

Thranduil did something for her, then, Tauriel would remember the rest of her days. The King put his arm around her shoulders and pulled her against his side. They passed through the gates of the Woodland Realm together, with her looking up at him as if seeing him for the first time.

"Thank you," she whispered.

"You are welcome." The King raised his eyebrows at her, and what he saw, she couldn't guess, but his voice lowered, gentled, "I'm wondering, Tauriel. Do you own any dresses?"

Her eyes widened at the question. "I don't, no. Not such as the ones in Lothlorien, but when I was preparing to leave, I discovered a package in room which contained three dresses I've never seen before and a note from Lady Arwen telling me I would look far better in their colors than she would."

"Ah, well. Could you wear one to break your fast in the dining hall tomorrow morning... as a favor to me?"

Tauriel drew a surprised breath and felt her face flush with color. She nodded, "Yes, my Lord."

Thranduil's lips quirked. "Good. I look forward to it."

Tauriel made a respectful bow and hurried off in the direction of her rooms, flustered.

The King's laughter followed her.

## Epilogue

A Dwarf knelt beside the graves of Kili and Fili. She wept as if her whole world had come crashing down and was buried in those simple graves.

Only one woman Tauriel could think of would feel such pain. Her pain was nothing compared to such as a mother losing her two children and a brother in one battle.

“Kili tried to keep his promise to you,” Tauriel told her.

Their mother blinked up at her, surprised to see she was no longer alone among the tombs. “I should never have let Thorin take them on his foolish quest. I knew the gold sickness would drive him mad.”

In her pocket, Tauriel’s fingers caressed Kili’s ruin stone. After a few moments of debate, she pulled it out and offered the stone to the grieving woman, who blinked at it and started to cry, again.

Tauriel winced. “He gave it to me, but it belongs to you,” she insisted.

“Did you love him?” Kili’s mother asked her.

“I didn’t know him for very long, but I did love him very much,” Tauriel told her. “I didn’t know how to love before I met Kili.”

The Dwarf offered Tauriel a watery smile, and said, “Keep the rune. Kili wouldn’t have given it to you if it wasn’t what he wanted. Both my sons knew their minds.”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t save Kili. I swear to you, I tried.”

Kili’s mother stood, wiping her hands down her woolen winter skirt to smooth it. “I’ve heard the story from Balin. You were nearly killed as well, and because you saved his life in Laketown, you earned the wrath of your King and exile from your people.”

“I did,” Tauriel admitted. “But, the King has forgiven me and allowed me to return home.”

“I’m glad.” Dis took Tauriel’s hand in her warm and strong grasp. “We can’t change what happened. The past is set in stone. Dwarves aren’t immortal, like your Elfkind. We are born, we live the days we are given by Mahal, and we die. It comforts me to know someone will be alive and still loving Kili long after I join my sons in the ground.”

Tauriel covered her mouth with her hand to stifle a sob she could feel trying to escape.

“Will you do something for me, beautiful fire-haired Elf?”

“Anything,” Tauriel said, and meant it. “My name is Tauriel.”

The Dwarf nodded, “Mine is Dis.”

“What would you have me do, my Lady?”

Her eyes were kind as she said, “Don’t let Kili be the last person you love.”

Tauriel nodded, not trusting herself to speak through the lump in her throat.

“Aren’t you going to ask?”

“Ask what?” Tauriel asked, confused.

“If my Kili had Elvish blood in him...”

Tauriel’s jaw dropped and she stammered, “I would never... that would be... terribly rude.”

Dis smiled and shrugged, “Dwarves aren’t big on politeness. We speak plainly. I don’t believe I ever laid with any but my husband, but Kili was a gift from Mahal just the same. My beautiful boy was conceived after too much ale on a long, hot summer night. Some nights I still dream of a handsome face with thick curly hair as black as coal tar, not a Man or Elf or Dwarf.”

Stunned, Tauriel didn’t know what to say.

Kili’s mother frowned up at someone behind Tauriel, and she turned to see King Thranduil walking across the cavernous room toward them. Tauriel smiled at him. “I wasn’t expecting you.”

“My business with Dain finished early.” He returned her smile with a quirk of his lips, and it was just as good as a smile to Tauriel. “I think they prefer dealing with you. Though I can’t imagine why, unless it is that you are nearly as stubborn and implacable as they.”

Tauriel gave him a look that said she would deal with his outrageous comment later, and turned to Kili’s mother, “My Lord, I would like you to meet Lady Dis. Sister of Thorin Oakenshield and... mother of Kili and Fili.”

Dis made an adorable face at Tauriel’s introduction. “You must be the Elven-king who threw Thorin’s company in his dungeon in Mirkwood.”

“I did. I tried to keep them from waking the dragon.”

Dis eyed him up and down, though not in an unfriendly way, “I wish you’d managed to hold onto them a while longer.”

Thranduil nodded his agreement, “As do I, my Lady.”

“I am pleased I got the chance to meet you, Lady Dis.”

Dis smiled at Tauriel, “I am glad to have met you as well, Tauriel. I hope we will have the chance to speak another time. I will be staying in Erebor and we will be neighbors.”

“I would like that very much. I have been tasked with leading the trade delegations to Dale and Erebor,” Tauriel nodded.

“Perfect. Next time you come, please seek me out.”

“I will.”

Dis patted her hand. “Remember your promise, Tauriel.”

“I won’t forget, my Lady,” Tauriel vowed.

It wasn’t until they were half way to the borders of Mirkwood that Thranduil asked her about the promise to Kili’s mother.

“Dis made me promise her I wouldn’t let Kili be the last person I loved.”

“Ah, a promise easily kept, then,” the King smirked.

Tauriel narrowed her eyes at him, “Most of the time. When you aren’t following me around and getting under my feet.”

“I’m giving you practice.”

She blinked at him, “Practice for what?”

“For when you give me the fire haired elleth I’ve been wanting.” Thranduil pulled her into a hug and kissed her. “Midsummer sounds like the perfect time to beget a child, don’t you think, Tauriel? It will give you time to resign yourself to the idea.”

“No.”

Thranduil laughed, “Oh, yes.”

The End.

## Bonus Scene

### Chapter Summary

I'm sick and sleep deprived and this scene will not go away, so I'm giving it to you. I blame the cold medicine.

(Rivendell, two years after BOTFA)

Tauriel discovered the Hall of the Valar on her first trade visit to Rivendell. Under its domed roof, each of the Vala had a small shrine at which visitors could leave an offering, such as a token item or song or whispered prayer.

The pedestals were arranged in pairs, for those Valar who were husband and wife, while others stood alone.

As she walked the circle for the first time, Tauriel noted the most well decorated, Yevanna, and the least adorned, her spouse, Aulë. As the one who brought Dwarves into the song of Eru, the Smith was not a popular Vala in Eldar cities such as Rivendell. Elves were immortal, baring a violent death or fading, and tended to carry their grudges through the Ages with them.

For her second trip, two years after the battle of Dale and Erebor, she had come well prepared. Tauriel left a small token at each of the shrines, except Aulë, because she was saving the special item in the velvet pouch for last.

"You missed one," a cloaked and hooded figure stated from where he was lounging against a granite pillar.

Tauriel started, because she'd not heard anyone enter and assumed herself alone in the Hall as she made her offerings. "I'm saving Aulë for last..."

The Man stood to his full height, which was a handspan above Tauriel's head, his face shadowed by the hood he was wearing. "Why?"

"Do you always loiter in this Hall and question the offerings of the visitors?" the wood-elf asked, amused and mildly exasperated.

"Curiosity is welcomed in Rivendell. Encouraged, even." And then he added, "Not many around here are feeling inclined to leave presents for a certain Vala after the recent visit from Thorin Oakenshield and his kin." He nodded to the empty shrine beside Yevanna's.

Tauriel turned to look at him, her eyes flashing, "Dwarves aren't always bad."

His hands went up defensively to ward off her tone. "I've never had a problem with them, personally."

Finished with the others, Tauriel walked over to the pillar designated to Aulë and pulled the velvet bundle from her belt pouch. From it, she took out a coin sized stone. It glowed like a tiny star and swirled with colors under the smooth surface. She kissed it and placed it on the altar.

"Ooh, nice. Where did you find that? Did you buy it in a shop?" The man asked her, his breath warm on her ear and the side of her face as he looked over his shoulder.

Tauriel shrugged him off, stepping away to get some distance between them. "I was in Erebor early this spring. I dug it out of the side of the tunnel myself."

"Singing stones are extremely rare and precious," he said. This Tauriel had been told many times since the day she found it.

Balin smiled in a strange way when the Elf stopped in dead in her tracks during the tour of the deep mine and started scratching at the wall with her belt knife. She could hear the strange high pitched noise as they passed. It was near the surface, but over a foot above the Dwarves' heads, so it was no wonder they missed it.

The Dwarves told her she must be favored by Mahal to be able to hear the stone's clarion call.

The wood-elf already felt she was favored by that particular Vala. He gave her something special with Kili for a brief moment in time, and although she'd lost him, Kili's kin had become her friends. They gave her something Tauriel needed, a feeling of family her people never managed to nurture in her heart. The survivors of Thorin's quest were always full of questions and advice regarding her life, her plans and travels, and even her budding relationship with Thranduil, though they couldn't see what attracted her to the 'giant ice carving of a King' as Dwalin called him.

When Tauriel tried to give the stone she found to King Dain, he'd smiled and politely refused it, saying the stone called her and therefore Tauriel must take it with her. First, though, he sent her to the gem cutters where Tauriel had been given a short course in polishing stones. Then, they set her to polishing the stone herself until it was gleaming and perfect.

"Why make a gift of your stone to Aulë, Tauriel?" the Man asked her.

Tauriel's lips quirked at the use of her name, because it seemed everyone in Rivendell knew who she was on sight. "Because he gave me an even more precious gift."

The light of Tauriel's candle, lit in offering to Estë, illuminated the lower half of his face, which was clean shaven, making him appear more like an Elf than a Man. "What sort of gift?"

"Aulë gave me my first love."

The stranger smiled at her. "I believe I have heard this tale, though it is a bit hard to believe. A nephew of Thorin Oakenshield won your heart. You left your home and disobeyed the commands of your King to save his life without regard for what would happen to you."

"Kili did have my heart." As to the rest, Tauriel didn't feel the need to defend her actions with regard to Thranduil to a stranger. The rift with her King was healed, and something started between them which she hoped would grow to be strong and eternal.

Tauriel turned to go and found her way blocked by the mysterious stranger. "Is there something you need of me?" she asked him, getting annoyed with him.

More of him was visible now: dark, curling hair and dark eyes which regarded her with wry amusement. "I have a message I've promised to convey to you."

"A message? What message?"

The Man took a step forward, and Tauriel retreated a step to counter his movement, like the

dancers. He reached out and took her hand in his, as if to give her something, and then used the grip to pull her into his arms, holding fast around her middle as she struggled against him, knocking his hood back and revealing his face completely.

Tauriel had only a fraction of a second to gasp, stunned by the familiar lines of his face, before his lips claimed hers, possessively. His hands came up to gently draw her in, cupping her face; a tender contrast to the heat in the kiss which lingered for several heartbeats.

The Elf was dazed and trembling when he finally let her step back from him. "You... I don't... How? You can't be Kili."

"I'm not your Kili, child, but he did wish with all his heart he could have returned your kiss. He feels you were cheated out of your only moments."

Tauriel stared hard at him, not trusting what her own eyes were telling her, her mind filled with shock and confusion. "You look so much like him..."

"No, it is quite the opposite. Kili looks like me, as he should given the fact I accidentally sired him on a long, hot summer night with Dis, her husband and far more ale than even an Ainur should attempt to drink in one sitting. But, I never could resist a good party..." He walked over to the monument and took up her stone, holding it to the light of the nearest torch, examining it, and nodding in satisfaction. "I accept your offering, and your gratitude, young Tauriel. This is the best gift I have received from an Elda in ages." He grinned at her, "King Thranduil and Lord Elrond certainly aren't in a mood to thank me for creating the Dwarves. Nor are they ever likely to be."

Then it hit her, who this was standing before her. "Aulë," Tauriel gasped, falling to one knee before him.

The Vala rolled his eyes and tugged Tauriel back to her feet impatiently by the shoulders. "Please don't kneel. It makes me extremely uncomfortable. I have never believed Eru's beautiful First Ones are meant to bend knee to the Valar. It bothers most of us when your people do it in Valinor, too." He gestured, circling a hand to the room full of shrines around him dedicated to the Valar. "Even this place is far more pretense than any of us want or need."

He tossed the stone up and caught it. "I think I will see your precious singing stone delivered to Kili. His heart aches for what could never be and I think this would prove a balm to him, much as his rune stone is to you. "

Aulë wandered to Yevanna's pillar and poked at the handful of seeds Tauriel left her, taken from her favorite trees in the deepest part of the forest once called Greenwood for good reason. "My lovely wife is overjoyed with your seeds. She weeps still over the fall of Greenwood the Great under the tainted Shadow of Sauron. I wish I had thought to collect seeds from the forest as a gift. It is a brilliant idea for an offering. Maybe she would forgive me more quickly."

At Tauriel's quizzical expression, he frowned and sighed, "Yevanna is very angry with me for not going against Manwë's rules and trying to save your love for you. You should have seen the fit of temper she had when you kissed him and Kili couldn't feel your lips on his."

"Yevanna wanted you to spare Kili?"

His dark eyes hardened and his ebony curls bounced against his shoulders as he shook his head, "I can't stop death, young one. Life and death are solely Eru's domain. I might have taken on flesh and helped in the battle, though, if I'd known it would go so badly for Thorin and his heirs." He didn't look happy. "I don't know of a single Ainur who wasn't moved to tears at your courage and



pain. Young love isn't meant to be ripped away so cruelly."

Tauriel swallowed the lump in her throat and nodded, unable to speak.

"Still, for a Dwarf youngster and a Elven youngster to even be able to put aside so much ingrained, hot-headed prejudice and fall in love? Gives me hope for my children's future. Kili is the prettiest Dwarf I ever created, I have to admit. Maybe, I should have made them all a bit more attractive to Eru's children. Might have saved us all some aggravation."

Tauriel made a face at his suggestion, an eyebrow raise of doubt.

"You aren't the only female who was fascinated by the Dwarf with the pretty face. Thorn's company came here to Rivendell first, and young Kili was the subject of much girlish giggling and sighing." He frowned, "Yevanna says I can't get drunk with my Dwarves anymore if I can't stay out of their beds. She didn't say anything against getting drunk and seducing wood-elves, though..." The hungry look he gave Tauriel said he was considering her potential as a bed partner and finding the prospect appealing.

Her mouth fell open, and Tauriel closed it with a snap. Clearing her throat, she said, "I'm not sure that would be a good idea..."

"You're probably right. Thranduil would have much more cause to hate me if you came back from this trade negotiation with more than just the good will of Lord Elrond, like maybe... a dark haired half Ainur babe in your belly?"

The wood-elf looked him in the eye, "You may look like Kili, but that isn't enough."

"I didn't think it would be. But I had to try," he said, grinning at her.

"What would your wife say?" Tauriel asked, accusingly.

Aulë shrugged, "Who says it wasn't my dear Yevanna's idea to start with? You are a lovely young wood-elf who leaves her seeds as an offering. She adores you, of course."

He chuckled at her expression, "Run along and make your trades, little Tauriel. Something tells me you will get whatever you ask for and then some. I need to go and give a gift to a sulky Drwarfling who desperately needs it."

"Thank you. For Kili and the kiss and everything," Tauriel stumbled over the words, cheeks reddening.

"You're welcome, child."

(Back in the Elvenking's Hall - three weeks later)

"It figures..." Thranduil groused. "Aulë would have to look like a taller version of your pretty Dwarf. I had no idea the Valar could sire offspring with mortals."

Tauriel grumbled, "He seemed to think he could sire offspring with me easily enough."

Thranduil turned to look over his shoulder at her, eyebrows raised. "Did he?" His voice lowered to the tone that always brought a shiver to Tauriel's spine, "They must have rules against seducing the Eldar, or Middle Earth would be filled with such children."

"I agree. And I was relieved he gave up so easily."

The King sighed, dramatically, "As for you, my dear Tauriel, I can see I'll just have to get my baby in there first." He turned around and stalked over to her, scooping Tauriel off her feet and heading in the direction of the bedroom with her.

"Wait, Thranduil, stop... We don't need to do it right now."

He smirked as she bounce on the soft down mattress, "We should practice."

"I had things planned for today."

"What sort of things, little Tauriel? You've only just arrived home." His eyes flashed, and Thranduil squared his shoulders. "They can wait for your attentions. I, however, cannot." He tossed his robe carelessly over a chair and advanced on her. "I don't like it when you're gone more than a fortnight. It's too quiet in the Halls. Everyone is afraid of me without you to champion them. They scatter like mice when I walk into a room."

"Oh, very well. Come here and hold me, my Lord," Tauriel smiled at him, holding out her arms in invitation. "I missed you, too."

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